



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

WIDENER



HN P9JD K

THE
HISTORY OF
THE
CITY OF
NEW-YORK
FROM
ITS FIRST SETTLEMENT
TO THE PRESENT TIME
BY
JACOB LEVINSKY
OF THE
CITY OF NEW-YORK

23697.598.130

**Harvard College
Library**



**FROM THE BOOKS
IN THE HOMESTEAD OF**

Sarah Orne Jewett

AT SOUTH BERWICK, MAINE



BEQUEATHED BY

Theodore Jewett Eastman

A.B. 1901 - M.D. 1905

1931

Justi

THREE MISS GRAEMES

Reprinted July 1908

THREE MISS GRAEMES

BY S. MACNAUGHTAN

AUTHOR OF "A LAME DOG'S DIARY"
"THE EXPENSIVE MISS DU CANE," ETC.

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY
1908

23697.598.130

~~AL 2423.3:15~~

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
THE BEQUEST OF
THEODORE JEWETT EASTMAN
1931

PRINTED BY
HAKELL, WATSON AND VINNY, LD.,
LONDON AND ATLESBURY,
ENGLAND

TO
M. St. H.

Three Miss Graemes

CHAPTER I

THE steamer landed Charles Hanbury and his luggage at the pier on Melvin, and from there he drove in a "machine" fourteen miles round to the other side of the island, where the hills look on to the Atlantic Ocean—and here Captain Graeme had said that a boat would meet him. It was a desolate piece of shore-land where the rough country dog-cart and slowly trotting grey mare at length drew up, and the absence of habitations of any sort excused Major Hanbury's somewhat loosely contrived question, when he got down from the cart and said to the driver, "Is this it?"

"Aye, it's it," said the man laconically. He was beginning to unbuckle the straps of the harness, and presently he led the horse into a rude stable, built just above the high-water mark of the shore, where a great red-brown ribbon of seaweed, dry and crackling, merged itself into the fine, sweet-scented grass of the meadows above it.

Major Hanbury lighted a cigar, and, for want of anything better to do, began to walk along

the road by which he had come, for it proceeded no farther than the point of shore-land where the driver had set him down. Some bare hills, softening to tenderest grey shadows in the early gloaming, rose before him, and through these the white road to the other side of the island wound itself in many fantastic curves, to disappear at last in a cleft cut between two giant boulders. A few shaggy Highland beasts, standing knee-deep in the watery grasses, stared at him with mild eyes; a pair of peewits uttered their solitary cries as they flew above the heather and the moss; and some grouse chuckled busily almost at his feet. The unsullied atmosphere was scented with brine, and the bracing odour gave its own unmistakable and unexplainable suggestion of space and solitude and storm.

Major Hanbury was a Londoner by birth, but he had a keen love for wild things, and a quick eye for every bird that flew. It was years since he had been in the Highlands, and his spirits rose at the prospect of a holiday. He was a man such as one may see by the dozen in the windows of any of the military clubs in London; but his record as a soldier had placed him in the forefront of the public gaze of late years. It was known that he had done well in a recent frontier campaign; and it was said of him—perhaps a little vaguely—that “he was always in some beastly climate putting things to right.” His eyes under the

brim of his travelling-cap were blue, and were like the eyes of a sailor who can see farther than a landsman can, or like those who have had to look dangers and difficulties and unpleasant things squarely in the face and to see beyond them. His sandy-coloured eyebrows, rather shaggy and long, were straightly drawn on a sun-burned forehead, and a heavy moustache concealed his mouth, giving to his face that suggestion of reserve which foreigners believe to be irritating, but which we ourselves seem to understand. There are probably scores of men very like him in the English army to-day; but one believes there were still more of them in the times when men fought with Nicholson before the gates of Delhi, or rescued women and children from the horrors of Lucknow. The public schools of England are still turning out a few men of the same pattern, and even journalism cannot vulgarise them by advertisement, for they have a simple way of doing their duty.

Major Hanbury turned in his walk, and stood for a moment in something very like amazement at the beauty of the scene before him. The sun was setting behind the small Island of Arvan, whither he was bound, and some purple storm-clouds rolled up grandly above the glare. The hills on the island seemed not only to be lit by flames, but looked almost transparent in the ruddy light. Between them and him there was a broad path of gold on the water, melting on

either side into a faint green colour reflected from the pale evening sky above him.

"This is splendid!" he said to himself, his eyes, with their trick of far-seeing, finding pleasure in the scene to its utmost limit. "It is odd to think that no one ever sees it from year's end to year's end except the grouse and the Highland cattle, who I don't suppose are able to appreciate it!"

He walked down to the shore again, while the sun sank behind the hills. The air began to grow chilly, and the soft, regretful gloaming of the North brooded over land and sea. At the stable he found his charioteer of the afternoon enjoying a pipe.

"Do you think they've remembered to send the boat?" he asked, for it was an hour since he had arrived at the solitary point of shore, and it seemed more than likely that it would be dark before he set sail.

"Och aye, she'll come—she'll come," said the man, without raising his eyes or turning round to speak to him.

"The steamer is generally in good time?" he ventured to the laconical driver when next his walk took him as far as the stable.

"There's whiles she's in time, and there's whiles she's no," said the man. "It doesna dae to fash aboot a stimmer."

"I think I see a sail now," said the traveller, as a boat drew near, and the driver replied, "Aye, yon's it," in a manner which showed that

he had for some time seen it approaching. It was nearly dark now, and Major Hanbury sat down on one of his portmanteaux, which had been deposited in the middle of the road, and waited. The wind was blowing dead aft, and a substantially built sailing boat, rigged with a rakish mast and a mainsail, foresail and jib, came towards them with filled canvas and a flourish of white foam about her bows. She looked first like a black speck on the burnished waters, which still shone faint and white after the sun had gone, and presently, as she drew nearer, he could see three figures in her without being able to detect whose they were. There were lights to port and starboard, and what seemed to be a big lantern in the stern of the boat.

Presently some directions were given in Gaelic in a clear voice, perhaps that of a boy, and then the mainsail came down, and with a pleasant rippling sound of water the boat glided to a jetty on the shore.

"Has he arrived?" he heard the clear voice say again, and then he knew that one of Captain Graeme's children must have come to meet him. He remembered that they were girls, and he thought that by now they must be nearly grown up, or at least at an advanced school-girl stage.

"Och aye, he's here," the driver of the dog-cart replied; and he and the boatman went to the heap of luggage in the middle of the road,

6 THREE MISS GRAEMES

and stowed it in the bow of the boat. Major Hanbury walked on to the jetty, and stepped into the stern where the lantern was, and raised his cap to the unknown figure seated there.

The lantern showed him a bit of rough dark-green tartan skirt and a hand well-shaped and white on the tiller, and beyond that its ministrations ceased. There was a lady in the boat who talked in a voice as clear as a child's, somewhat low-pitched, as the tuneful Scottish habit is, and evidently belonging to a young girl. Major Hanbury was by nature a quiet man, and he attempted no conversation at first, being entirely taken up with admiring the way in which the sailing boat was handled. Her sails filled again as she swung away from the jetty and began to tack towards the opposite shore. The breeze was freshening now, and there was a list on the boat as she laid up to windward; each "leg" was taken with precision as she put about and swung diagonally across the water again. Once when she came smartly about, Major Hanbury began to wonder what the lady at the tiller, who directed her course with so much judgment, could be like. But the lantern was baffling in its reserve; it revealed the white hand on the tiller, a piece of rough tartan skirt and small brogued shoe, but these were not altogether indicative of character. Had it been a masqued figure who steered the boat his knowledge of her features could not have been less.

Some light chopping waves broke over the gunwale as the boat heeled over on a short tack home, and he felt a tweed cape being put about his shoulders by the unknown maiden in the dark, while a voice full of solicitude and care said, "I'm afraid you will get wet."

Major Hanbury laughed. "Aren't you getting wet yourself?" he said.

And the voice above the lantern replied, "No, thank you, but I fear you may take a chill. We understand that the English are a very delicate race."

They ran into a creek presently where the water was smooth, and a small stone-built pier led on to some rocks above. The ground was uneven and slippery, and once Major Hanbury very nearly fell. "You must take my hand," said the voice beside him, and he found his fingers held in a cool, firm grasp.

Only when the door of the house was reached did she leave her hold of his hand. It was pitch-dark under some wind-blown trees between the house and the shore, and the jealous lantern, which had shown him so little in the boat, was in use by the men who were looking after the luggage. Major Hanbury had always been a leader of men—report had it that on his most successful expeditions he invariably cut the telegraph wires by which orders reached him before deciding any difficult point in a campaign. His men had learned to follow him blindly into precarious and difficult places, and he had

done some arduous exploring work in his time. To-night, in the Western Highlands of Scotland, he found his hand held by a girl, who bade him take care on the slippery unknown shore, and led him, as though he had been a little boy, to the door of her father's house.

When the door opened he found himself in an old-fashioned stone hall, with recessed windows showing walls six feet in depth. The place was almost void of furniture, save for a few old-fashioned tables and chairs which were dwarfed by the size of the room; some skins spread upon the stone floor recalled the fact that Captain Graeme had been a well-known big-game shooter in his day. A couple of lamps were burning upon the table: "And now," thought Major Hanbury, "for a look at my guide!" He had a sort of holiday gaiety about him, not quite usual with him, for he was a grave man for the most part. He turned to thank the girl for her safe conduct of him across the water and over the rough track to the house, and he caught a momentary glimpse of her as she walked across the hall and opened a distant door to summon her father. He saw a tall, almost boyish figure, upright and slender, upon which a rough homespun jacket hung loosely; a small head with thick brown hair tied in an old-fashioned queue with a broad, black ribbon, and surmounted by a Prince Charlie's bonnet with a moorcock's feather stuck in it. The tartan skirt which he had seen hung straightly

down; it was cut short above small brogued shoes and hand-knitted stockings, and showed the slenderness as well as the energetic poise of the figure. Her walk, he thought, was like some noble boy's, wholly unaffected, and the reverse of "tripping." Her head was held erect, and her feet were firmly set down. She had to stoop a little as she entered the low door on the other side of the hall.

Captain Graeme came out of the room to greet him, and the two friends met after fifteen years of separation.

Major Hanbury had been a boy when he joined the regiment in which Graeme was then Captain. A close friendship had sprung up between the two, and this was deepened when Charles, who ever had an old head on young shoulders, had been the means of getting hot-headed, impulsive Captain Graeme out of a very serious scrape. His friends could hardly remember the time when Captain Graeme had not been in scrapes. Impulsive, charming, utterly lacking in self-discipline, he spent money with both hands, deliberately shut his eyes to the consequences of any of his actions, was nearly always in debt, and never had an hour's wakefulness over his difficulties. His temper was of the shortest description, and his genius for backing the wrong horse was proverbial. He laughed over everything when he had finished swearing at it; dismissed his servants one hour, and received them back into

favour the next; and ran through a fortune without the least concern or a moment's repentance. Money was made for spending, and in any case he was heir to very considerable wealth from childless uncles and aunts who had given him everything he wanted all his life.

"People are so lucky," he used to say, "to be born prudent! But I can't see how you can possibly tell what a thing is going to look like until you have done it, and then, of course, it's impossible to do the other thing!" Every one forgave him his faults—he was a man very easy to forgive. His last sixpence was at the service of any person who wanted it, and men rode his horses and borrowed his money and loved him, and paid back his kindnesses when they could. The extravagance of such a man, his many errors, his deep affection, and his bad luck might get him into trouble, or might even excuse the judgment upon him that he was hopelessly wrong-headed, undisciplined, or even unprincipled; but the serious time comes when such a man falls in love. Captain Graeme fell in love in a headlong manner—jealously, passionately, with all his heart and soul. His wife was one of those singularly lovely women whose beauty clothed a nature as little desirous of notoriety as it is possible to be. "People went mad about her," to use a common expression for the admiration of the multitude; and Captain Graeme was jealous of

the very maid who dressed her hair, the books she read, and the children who came to her. He mounted guard over his beautiful wife, and she was never seen in public without him. A nervous watchfulness, even if it is instigated by passionate love, may become irksome; but Mrs. Graeme was of too serene a nature to resent the burden of her husband's jealous custody. She was infinitely contented to find her whole happiness with him and with her three little girls, and her gentle patience never failed. It was not that she put a curb upon herself or checked a natural irritation; there was within her an intrinsic tranquillity which made for calm. No one had ever seen her hasty; few people had even known her to be ruffled. All her life long she had inspired love, and love had sheltered her and given her a certain serene confidence, far removed from stagnation, which believed in goodness and happiness to the exclusion of everything else. Her girlhood had been spent in a convent, in the shelter of its walled garden and under the care of the placid nuns, and when she exchanged this guarded life for marriage with a man whom she loved, and the society of her children, it entirely satisfied her. When Captain Graeme became irritable and morose, and wanted to know what she had been doing in this place and what she had said in that, and how she had passed her time, his suspicions jarred less upon her than they would have

jarred upon most women. There was not a thought of hers which he might not know. With ingenuous sweetness she would answer every question, until, horribly ashamed of himself and of his suspicious interference, he would call himself cur and blackguard for daring to grieve her by his jealous folly, and would heap presents upon her as reparation for his fault. The sun never went down or rose upon any wrath of hers; the forgiving kiss was not once for an instant withheld.

Their married life ended in a tragedy. By that time half his friends were tired of him and had a dozen tales to tell about his senseless behaviour. He was not so much a husband as a policeman, they used to say, and no one but Mrs. Graeme would have stood it for so long. Every action of hers was supervised. The saying got about that Graeme had to remember that he was a gentleman or he would have read her letters. She was not allowed to receive men-callers, and a sort of duenna, a French lady of noble family who had fallen upon evil fortunes, went with her even on her drives. Graeme was behaving like a fool, and from being the best fellow in the world, with a dozen daring escapades to his name, he had become a sort of bulldog with a growl for every one.

Perhaps the fact that Mrs. Graeme was kept more or less in purdah fashion provoked still farther the enthusiasm that her beauty had

excited. Be that as it may, she was sought for everywhere. Admiration was bestowed lavishly upon her, and if love was not actually laid at her feet it was doubtless inspired by her beauty and her kindness, while as certainly it was all unsuspected by her.

At last the inevitable thing happened: some object was found on which Captain Graeme's jealousy might concentrate itself. He quarrelled with one of the most popular men in the service, insulted him at a club one night, and crossed over to Boulogne on the following day, where he shot his friend in a duel; and then, having narrowly escaped punishment in one of the most sensational trials of the day, he left the world suddenly and absolutely, and took his wife and three children to the Island of Arvan, which, with a large fortune, he had inherited shortly after his marriage. It was well that he did so. Public opinion was against him to a man, and some hot-tempered spirits even talked wildly of a rescue-party to release Mrs. Graeme from her prison in the grey seas. Every one was sorry for her, and when she died on the island two years later people said that her heart was broken. This interpretation of the case was probably not the correct one. Mrs. Graeme was a woman to whom the reserve and protection of home had appealed strongly; it is doubtful whether she would ever have become irked by her husband's too watchful care of her. The world about

her might be sinful, and society might earn for itself dishonourable names; but hers was one of those dove-like natures which, had it lain among the pots, would still have kept untarnished, her wings like silver and her feathers covered with gold. Now she had to learn, in a sensational case which every pot-boy reading his halfpenny newspaper of an evening under the street lamp discussed and enjoyed, that there were things in the world undreamed of in her philosophy, and that the fierce white light of suspicion had even beat on her retired and sheltered home. Publicity was hateful to her, and the horror of the long trial, during which her husband's life and honour were at stake, the daily waiting for news, the odious paragraphs in the newspaper at which she dared not look—these, indeed, had come very near to breaking her heart. The shelter and peace of the sea-girt island with its heather moors and storm-tossed trees was the asylum which she herself would have chosen, and was the only place remote enough and solitary enough wherein to hide and be forgotten. There she died and was buried, and there her three children grew up. Their mother's French companion was their governess, and their religious education was handed over to the minister of the island. Their father's guest to-night was the first stranger they had ever seen within their doors.

CHAPTER II

MAJOR HANBURY dressed for dinner in a stone-built room on the ground floor. The room was dimly lighted by candles set in heavy silver candlesticks, and a huge four-post bed was hung with delicate silk brocade a century old. His portmanteaux and boxes looked out of place and modern amongst the antique contents of the room. Here were some old sporting-prints, and there was a Jacobean kist. The high stone mantelpiece was Florentine in design, and Major Hanbury remembered how at one time it had been the extravagant young soldier's hobby to collect beautiful things from every part of the world. He even remembered having helped him to choose a carved mirror on the wall, one winter many years ago, when they had spent their leave together in Italy.

"I cannot think," mused Major Hanbury to himself, "why he has suddenly allowed me to come and visit him now!"

It is true they had corresponded for many years, and sometimes at a lonely frontier station, for instance, when the solitary soldier had many hours of leisure on his hands, he would send his friend a long account of his doings, or give him

details—unpublished in the newspapers—of this campaign or of that. But he had never dreamed of being invited to the island ; it had become a sort of fairy story amongst Captain Graeme's friends that this island even existed. The world missed him very little, but in a measure it had forgiven him. It had partially forgotten his later follies, and remembered him—when it remembered him at all—as a fellow with no head on his shoulders but with a very good heart, and one, moreover, that was always in the right place, as they say. It supposed that it was his own business whether he liked to live on an island lapped round on every side by the waves of the Atlantic, or whether he preferred a life of comfort amongst his clubs and his friends in London. As one of the absent Captain Graeme was not always wrong, but was simply forgotten.

A gong sounded in the hall, and even the gong awoke an old memory in Major Hanbury. It was a Chinese one of solid bronze, and he remembered with a smile how, when it was bought, young Graeme had brought it to the barracks one day, and practised upon it until his outraged brother-officers made an attack upon his room—and subsequently upon his head, with the gong-stick.

"I remember the old gong," he said to his friend, when he found him in the hall before dinner. Some gap of years seemed suddenly to be bridged over, and the two men broke

into a laugh. It was the first time for years that Captain Graeme had laughed spontaneously.

"You whacked my head, Charles," he said; "but I think, if I remember aright, part of the gong formed a booby-trap at the top of your door shortly afterwards?"

"I have the mark still," said Major Hanbury.

A serving-man in a kilt threw open the dining-room door, and announced in a strong south Scottish accent that "dinner was on the tebble," and Captain Graeme said, "You must be hungry, Charles. I fear you were kept waiting for a long time on the shore this afternoon. We do not always get accurate information about what time the steamer reaches Melvin."

"I was admirably steered home," Charles Hanbury said; "I don't think we wasted a capful of wind the whole way."

"Helen is a capital coxswain," said Captain Graeme.

An elderly French lady with grey hair elaborately dressed, and wearing a black satin gown, entered the hall, and was ceremoniously introduced to his guest by Captain Graeme. She apologised in French for the absence of her charges, explaining punctiliously that the boat had been a little late in getting in.

"We will wait a few minutes," said Captain Graeme.

Major Hanbury had time to notice that everything was formal and ceremonious in the house.

His host wore evening dress not quite of the latest fashion, but scrupulously well cut. Within the dining-room he caught sight of a long table elaborately covered with old silver and glass.

"Here are my girls," said Captain Graeme.

A broad tunnel-staircase with solid walls, led from the hall to the upper regions, and was dimly lighted by a hanging-lamp. There was a sound of long skirts sweeping the bare oak boards of the staircase as the three girls descended together. They were dressed alike : all of them in white satin dresses, heavy and sumptuous, and made without trimming or ornament of any kind. The full, wide skirts gave a certain amplitude and presence to the slender figures. Their manner of walking, Major Hanbury noticed again, imparted a distinction to simplicity, and suggested something noble without being imposing.

"This is my eldest daughter, Helen, who met you in the boat," said Captain Graeme ; and Helen Graeme made a deep curtsy to her father's guest. The black ribbon which she had worn in the afternoon had been discarded, and her hair was dressed after a fashion suggestive of some ancient print of a bygone French period. Round her neck was a single long string of pearls—a present which poor Captain Graeme had given to his wife after one of his outbursts of jealous temper—and a high comb studded with pearls

set in her hair added to her height. But it was the beauty of her face which put every consideration of her dress out of the mind of the observer. Major Hanbury remembered the late Mrs. Graeme as one of the loveliest women of her day; but there was something in Helen's figure which suggested a certain air of stateliness such as Mrs. Graeme had not possessed, and the hazel eyes were an inheritance from her father.

"My daughters Agatha and Jean," said Captain Graeme. Two girls of perhaps eighteen and sixteen respectively, one with a long plait of hair down her back, offered him their hands with the same curtsey the other sister had given. He gave his arm to the eldest, and they went into the dining-room. Here again there was evidence of Captain Graeme's taste as a collector, and of his power in gratifying it. The stonework was entirely Florentine, and included a carved frieze of extraordinary beauty set above the oak paneling of the room. The carpet and hangings were also of Florentine design, as were some high-backed chairs, deeply carved, which were placed at either end of the dinner-table. Their immense arms and towering, heavily gilded backs gave them an appearance of something throne-like and magnificent, and the girl who sat in the one at the farther end of the room had a fine setting for her beauty. Her head, with its high comb of pearls, stood out like

some delicate painting against the dim gold of the carved wood, and her arms were lightly laid on the dragons which formed the arms of the chair. Mentally, Major Hanbury likened her to a picture of Marie Antoinette at the court of Versailles ; or was it, perhaps, Mary Queen of Scots, newly arrived from her beloved France ? He supposed that the elderly French lady of noble birth, who lived with them, had imparted a certain foreign touch to the girls' behaviour and mode of dressing, and the father's love of Florentine art had accidentally provided a fit setting for the picture.

Dinner was served with considerable state, the elaborate *menu* was written in French, and French was spoken throughout the whole evening. Captain Graeme and his guest had spent time enough abroad together to be aware that the language was familiar to both of them, and dinner was half over before it occurred to Captain Graeme to say, "We generally speak French in the evenings ; I hope it doesn't bore you. Madame and my girls have got into the habit of using it more than their native tongue, I am afraid, and when I am not with them they talk French the greater part of the day."

For a moment Major Hanbury wondered what there was to talk about on the lonely heather-covered island, with its dozen families, perhaps, of crofters, and the old Highland minister in the little stone manse by the shore.

He began to ask himself absurd questions : Did they see newspapers ? Were letters brought to them ? What communication had they with the outside world ? It would be absurd, perhaps, to touch on the current topics of interest of the day. Would they be interested in Parliamentary news or in foreign politics ? How banal to tell them that a Liberal member had been returned for Cardiff, or that the Chinese Labour question in South Africa was not yet settled ! On the remote island, with its wind-torn beech-trees, its hills and solitary moors, the stir and stress of the world, its quarrels, its struggles, and its amusements seemed to belong to some other order of things. Major Hanbury thought that if he had heard the election intelligence of the planet Mars, it would hardly have touched him less than the topics and questions of the world which he had just left seemed able to touch him to-night. The princess at the head of the table, with her coronet and throne, had perhaps never heard of the Education Bill, nor had seen a croquet tournament, a motor-car, or a skating-rink. The news of the world, even on its girlish, gossiping side, must be unknown to her. He thought it strange to find himself talking to a woman who had never been at a garden-party or a theatre ; and he wondered if a Mudie's book-box ever arrived on the island, and whether a telephone had been heard of here.

"Monsieur," said Miss Graeme, leaning forward to him a little as she spoke, with a touch of regal courtesy which again suggested the court of Versailles, "will you be kind enough to tell us if you were able to get an evening newspaper on the steamer this afternoon?"

"I think I have one in my ulster pocket," he said, and added the usual formula, "There was nothing in it."

"Can you tell us who won the St. Leger?"

Had a child suddenly asked him about some affair of diplomacy or the money-market it would have surprised him less.

"Yes," he said, "St. Cuthbert has won; I do know that, although I thought the paper would contain nothing that would interest you."

"We are much obliged to you, sir." She looked across at her father, and made him a little bow. "My felicitations to you," she said. He raised his glass as though drinking to the health of the good horse, and thanked her as gravely as she had offered her congratulations.

"He still bets then," said Major Hanbury to himself. "Fifteen years on an island has not entirely quenched his ruling passion." He began to talk of racing matters, of which he knew very little. "I still take a ticket for the Calcutta sweep," he said, "so I really do know who has won the Derby; but beyond that, and going to a few local gymkhanas in India, I know very little about racing matters."

Pincent used to be your trainer, used he not ? Have you still horses with him ? ”

“ I have little left but what the sea surrounds here,” said Captain Graeme briefly.

The least curious of men, Major Hanbury found himself wishing that he was better informed about his surroundings, more from a desire to find some topic of mutual interest than from any sort of inquisitiveness. He could imagine an American straight from New York being landed here, and asking where the nearest telegraph office was, or at what time the post arrived, and his dismay in finding himself in a place where perhaps posts and telegrams were not known. The modern books of the day seemed to be unread on the island, but a discussion had arisen between the youngest girl and Madame on some matter of French literature. Racine, Voltaire, Corneille were discussed with an amount of knowledge which was slightly bewildering at first. From French literature to English classics was but a step, and warlike figures began to live, heroes of poetry and drama moved like familiar forms in a scene. Friends and favourites were mentioned with a personal knowledge of the characters of each, and history and romance seemed to be accepted equally as veracious documents. The world was a wide one, and full to overflowing with heroic figures. King Arthur had lived and loved far away in the valley of the Usk. Ulysses had sailed to the

beautiful islands of Greece, and Hector's death was a sacred reminiscence, too fresh still to be spoken of without emotion. Some Hebrew sheiks stalked among the goodly company, Abraham and Job, and Amos the puncher of figs, with his voice of thunder. Questions were put to the guest: Were there royal barges upon the Thames, and tourneys where queens of beauty sat? Did he think that Lancelot loved the Lily Maid when she came to him on her last journey, all in white, and with the dumb servitor guiding her slowly down the river? Did Jael really outrage all hospitality when she drove the nail into the temples of her unbidden guest, or was it true that her husband was a traitor to his party, and that with all her seeming treachery Jael was really fighting for her own people and for their cause? Mr. Macdonald thought that this might be so, and that there was internal evidence to prove it; what was Major Hanbury's opinion of the matter? Had he ever travelled in the East? And what of London? Had he been in Whitehall and walked past the place where King Charles was beheaded? Did the English people remember Flodden and Culloden, and who was left who was still on the Prince's side?

As a boy Major Hanbury had been much alone, and had made his own dreams, and had lived with his own heroes. It was the first time in his life in which he had spoken of them to

others. Before dinner was over he was smiling quietly to himself at the thought that he had wondered what he would talk about. Here was not conversation so much as glowing, vivid recollections, living portraits of men and women, old stories about them which he had forgotten, and tales that for the first time had an entirely new meaning in them. All these friends and heroes had fought well, all had loved, and all were now at rest. In the dreamy life of the Highlands he wondered if the dead-and-gone men and women were as far away as history taught us to think they were.

"The wind is freshening," Captain Graeme said, as the breeze tossed the beech-trees near the shore, and boomed in the wide chimney of the dining-room where they sat. "I doubt if the post will get over in the boat to-night with the letters." He turned to his guest. "It does not usually get in till ten o'clock, and then only on three days in the week."

"To-night we shall sit up late," said Jean presently, "in case the boat is able to come. There is a telegraph office at Melvin, and we shall get letters and telegrams telling us about the race. I have often had a great wish," she said, "to know what a telegraph office is like."

"Pardon, monsieur, but could you tell me something of a young horse called Dutchman," said Agatha, "who is now being trained at the Radcliffe stable?"

"I am very sorry," said Major Hanbury,

whose slow mind had not quite finished with King Arthur, "but I really know nothing about it." "Could a modern English race-course be evolved out of the imagination?" he wondered. "If so, what resemblance had it to tourneys?"

The servant in the kilt, who had waited throughout dinner behind his master's chair, came again into the room with his pipes and walked round the table, playing first of all the "Graeme Gathering," and then a variety of tuneful Scottish airs with plaintiveness in them underneath the merriment of the dance. When he had finished his tunes he stood and drank off a glass of whisky to the health of the Laird and the ladies, and then, dessert being placed upon the table, Major Hanbury saw the girl whose intimate acquaintances seemed to be King Arthur and Elaine, Jael, Ruth, and the most prominent of the English trainers and jockeys, bend her head over her plate, whilst the others did likewise, and in English she said a grace which Charles Hanbury imagined he had heard years ago in some godly Scottish house. Madame crossed herself, and the ladies left the room.

"I sent for you, Charles," said Captain Graeme, "after all these years, because I believe my health to be very bad."

He had left his own place at the head of the table, and with a chilly movement had drawn to the side nearest the fire. Major Hanbury

did the same, leaning his elbow on the table with its profusion of flowers and old Venetian glass, and turning his face towards the fire. He looked keenly at Captain Graeme after he had spoken, and would have said something; but the elder man went on immediately, as though with a wish to prevent the unspoken words from being uttered.

"I do not suppose myself to be in any immediate danger," he said, "but I think my heart is affected, and I want you, first of all, to find out for me who is the heart specialist of the day, and to send him to me when you return to London, and then I want you to help me to put my affairs in order."

A man-servant entered with coffee. Captain Graeme instructed him to put some more coal on the fire, and waited until he had left the room before he continued to speak. He rubbed his delicate hands, blue-veined and thin, at the blaze of the fire, and then said in equal, unemotional tones, "I had a very large fortune, as you know—enormous, some people would have called it. Well, it is gone."

Again he seemed half afraid that his companion was going to speak, but a look at Major Hanbury's face showed him that he was to be allowed the privilege of continuing his story without interruption, and he went on more leisurely, and still without emotion: "Some men take to drink when they have broken their hearts or have killed the thing

that was dearest to them in the whole world. I took to gambling. Racing has been my one excitement while I have lived here; except for that, I doubt if I should even have had letters and telegrams brought to me. It is in my blood to gamble, and I suppose one's worst qualities generally triumph when one lives in a state of despair. Be that as it may, I believe that racing and gambling have kept me from going mad, for which I feel thankful. I do not like the idea of losing either my brain or my nerve, Charles; so far I have lost neither. To-night, when you told us that St. Cuthbert had won the St. Leger, I knew that I had lost a large remnant of what remains of my fortune. I hope I did not show this—I do not suppose that you showed that you were hurt when you got a bullet through your shoulder in West Africa."

"You did not show it," said Major Hanbury briefly.

"Thank you. . . . There are far too many servants here," he said abruptly, and with a moment's return to that irritability which had distinguished him as a younger man. "Still," he went on more smoothly, "there is no need to retrench yet. . . . What do people seem to think about Carpet Knight? He ran well at Ascot."

He spoke inconsequently, but without hurry; while all the time it was evident that he was avoiding a subject about which he wished to speak. "My girls," he said, "always believe

that I win when I bet. Their training has not been a conventional one. Living as they do without ever leaving the island, except to sail in their boat, it could hardly be otherwise than unconventional. Their religious education has been conducted by our worthy Mr. John Macdonald, who lives on the island. Their Creator—who is a Being, I believe, whom they often confuse with Zeus, while Mount Olympus and heaven are probably very much alike to them—is a Power who controls and directs the most trivial affairs of men. My daughters pray for everything that they want, and I send to London for it for them. In this way, as you may imagine, they have grown up with a strong belief in Providence. My”—he smiled a little—“perhaps phenomenal successes in racing are due to the same Power—which, of course, raises the ethical point whether one is entitled to pray for what involves another’s loss. The difficulty, solved with some adroitness, found its expression in my youngest daughter’s voice when I heard her suggest to one of her sisters the other day that they should play a prayer-barred game together. You will pardon the quaint jumble of sporting terms and theology amongst us! Briefly, as I am Providence, and therefore omnipotent, I must not lose money nor back the wrong horse. As a matter of fact, I am very far from being ruined, but I want to live long enough to win back my money, and for

that reason I desire a visit from a heart-specialist."

"When does the post leave?" said Major Hanbury. "I could send a note to Sir Matthew Fergusson by the man who brings the letters to-night."

"You were always prompt," said Captain Graeme; "perhaps that is one reason of your success."

Major Hanbury went to a writing-table, and rapidly wrote a note and sealed it.

"And now," said Captain Graeme, "I want to show you a will that I have made. With your permission I am leaving you sole executor for my daughters. They have no near relations in the world except my brother's widow, Lady Parfield, of whom I have not heard for some years. She used to suggest," he continued drily, "taking us on a round of autumn visits——" He broke off with a little smile, and then went on with the business of his will. "Everything, with the exception of a few legacies to servants here, will, of course, go to my girls, and the island will be Helen's. It is excellently stocked with game, and it should bring in a large rental for shooting if ever the need to let it should arise."

"Which God forbid!" said Charles Hanbury. "I do not imagine your daughters would care for the world."

"I hope," said Captain Graeme, "that there will never be any necessity for them to enter

it; I hope there may be sufficient for my girls to live on undisturbed here. The world and I between us killed my wife. It has a thousand eyes, and each one of them is full of menace and of mischief; there is nothing private or sacred in it. I loathe it, and I loathe the people in it."

Captain Graeme stopped, and poured himself out a glass of wine. He still spoke quietly and without emphasis. "I never allow myself to get excited over things," he said, "because it brings on a pain in my heart, which I find difficult to bear without being a coward. . . . You will understand, of course, that although I believe I have heart complaint (it may be a violent form of indigestion), I still think that I may live for many years, and that in those years I may recover the money which I have lost. I merely want to tidy things up and put them straight, in case, by any chance, I should have to leave unexpectedly, or at short notice.

"I have a small property in Lincolnshire, which has been let for many years. The present occupier wants to buy it, and as I have no sons I think it will be as well to allow him to do so. The lease of my London house lapses almost immediately, and is, therefore, practically valueless. My present income is chiefly derived from investments, which I shall ask you to look into, as they have not been touched for fifteen years. Will you follow me

into the library, where I shall ask for your signature to several papers."

Major Hanbury rose and followed his host, and, seating himself beside a writing-table, he gave his required signature, and made notes of all that was said to him. Another man, perhaps, might have put off such business, or expostulated with the sick man's fancies about his health, urging him at the same time not to worry or exert himself. Charles Hanbury had a certain soldierly precision about business matters, and seldom, for instance, left a letter unanswered after the day he had received it. He gave his friend one steady look out of grave eyes beneath their overhanging sandy eyebrows, and having done so he allowed him to proceed with his business without the irksomeness of protest.

The two men sat writing and talking till nearly eleven o'clock, when the clang of a bell at some outer gate caused a pause in their work. "That is the postman," said Captain Graeme, and added quietly, "Pray remember that I have backed St. Cuthbert!"

They went into the drawing-room, where the ladies still sat; even Madame did not insist upon early hours on the nights when the postman came over the dark strip of water between the island and Melvin, and brought the latest racing news to the isolated Highland household. Two of the girls were seated at embroidery-frames, stitching designs in silk

in imitation of the Florentine hangings in the dining-room, and Agatha, the pale sister with the dusky-coloured hair which had no shades of gold in it such as brightened the brown of the other girls' heavy plaits, was at the piano. The piper who had played after dinner in the dining-room brought in the bag of letters and newspapers, and waited attentively to hear the news.

Captain Graeme read of the favourite's victory at Doncaster. "A good horse," he said, "and ran well."

"And now that you know all, my dear children," said Madame, "I must bid you good-night, and you must have your prayers and go to bed."

"They are waiting for prayers," said the old piper in a confidential whisper.

Madame said good-night, and went to bed. Her creed was directly opposed to the teaching of the Reverend John Macdonald, and she had her breviary, and even her tiny chapel—a stone-built closet, known as the priest's room, situated in the oldest part of the house. The only protest which her fervent catholicism ever demanded was to withdraw before evening prayers, and to absent herself from the little Presbyterian kirk on Sundays. Helen had always read prayers every night in the stone hall since she was a child, and Madame had never even dared to ask her whether she used a Prayer-book.

Some long oak tables were set lengthwise on the stone floor, and reached from one end of the great room to the other. On these Bibles were placed at intervals, while some chairs of a curious pattern, which Major Hanbury had seen ranged along the walls of the room, were placed in rows at the tables. At the upper end of the room, with a tall silver candlestick on either side of it, lay a large open Bible with silver clasps, and in front of this Helen Graeme seated herself, while the servants and retainers—an extravagantly large number—came and took their places round the table.

Major Hanbury had always imagined that the Book of the Prophecy of Isaiah could only be heard to proper advantage when read from a Scottish pulpit by some Scottish divine. There was a certain grandeur of enunciation about the Northern tongue, a fine rolling of the syllables, and an austerity of pronunciation that seemed to suit the words of the text. The English slurring of the "r's" had never seemed appropriate to the reading of it. It always wanted, he thought, the roughness and music of the Scottish intonation; to-night he believed he was hearing the true poetry of the book for the first time. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them," read Helen Graeme, "and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." She sat upright in her chair, the heavy rope of pearls about her neck, and the high comb set crownlike in her hair.

Her hands were laid simply on the great book in front of her, and the flames of the candles burned steadily and shed a kindly light on the grave, beautiful face. The inflection of her voice recalled, ever so slightly, the reading of the ancient Scottish divine who had taught her from the Book; but the quality of her voice as a reader was nearly faultless, and it seemed to the man who listened to her that in actual melody he had never heard anything to surpass it. The servants on either side of the long tables sat with bent heads following "The Word" in their own books. Some of them kept a worn finger upon the open page, and followed the text while they whispered the words, and the younger ones mostly sat silent, with downcast eyes—the maids with trim French caps upon their heads, and the men for the most part in livery, or wearing the kilts of outdoor service.

When the reading was over, each one kneeled down in his or her place, and the girl who conducted their worship kneeled also, the flames from the candle making a shining aureole round her head. "O Lord," she said, "we desire to thank Thee for all Thy mercies, but particularly for Thy generous favour in giving victory to the horse St. Cuthbert. We pray Thee that Thou wilt comfort those who have lost fortune or who have found disappointment over the event, and we beseech Thee that Thou wilt bless

36 **THREE MISS GRAEMES**

for good the gains of those who have won ;
and, whether we lose or win, may we do all
to the glory of Thy name."

"It is worth while," said Captain Graeme,
as he and his friend bade each other good-
night, "to play Providence to such devout
believers."

CHAPTER III

MAJOR HANBURY had been a fighting man since his boyhood ; he had known little leisure, and responsibility had become second nature to him. When the sun rose over the hills and awoke him the following morning, there was a sense of elation in the feeling that he was on an island where nothing urgent or important could touch him. He told himself that fortune had never placed him in so impregnable a stronghold before ; the War Office itself could not trouble him much here. The post arrived thrice a week—weather permitting—and telegrams arrived as seldom. Newspapers seemed only to be read for the racing news which they contained, and war itself could hardly disturb this peaceful haven. Down by the shore, which he could see from his window, the very sea-birds had an air of confidence in their gait as they strutted about quite close to the house, and a lonely heron, standing immovable on a rocky point covered with red-brown seaweed, never stirred from its position when a herd-boy passed the place with his cows. The loneliness of the place was immanent, complete, almost tangible. Its contact with the rest of the

world was non-existent. Did an enterprising crofter go "oot tae Glascae," he was an object for many visits from his neighbours on his return. The women on the island had heard of trains, but had never seen them. The schoolmaster and the minister had books and spoke English, and a ne'er-do-weel son of the principal crofter had been to New Zealand and back again. Duncan Mackenzie the piper alone was a travelled man, and went to visit his folk at Peebles every year.

The desire to be out-of-doors almost on the instant of waking was strong in a place where the call of nature was insistent, and spoke at the very door in the burn that chattered over the stones or whispered softly upon the hill-side. The moist air blew in at the open window, fragrant with the clean smell of seaweed. Some blue peat-smoke rose from a cabin by the shore, and a rowan tree near the window, whose berries were turning red, looked like a giant candelabrum hung with a thousand lights.

To live amidst such surroundings in the very lap of nature in her kindest mood was the only perfectly enjoyable sort of life, Major Hanbury said to himself as he was dressing, while he thought without envy of his friend who owned this favoured spot. He himself contemplated many years of soldiering before he could dream of settling down. But

he liked his work, and a holiday was a keen enjoyment after a long sojourn at an Indian station.

He had learned over-night that the household breakfasted in the French fashion at eleven o'clock, and he drank his chocolate before setting out for a walk as soon as he was dressed. He found that the roads upon the island were little more than tracks—Roman roads the people called them, although whether the Legions had ever come so far is very doubtful. The turf which nearly covered them was full of spring to his feet as he strode away past a group of cottages near the shore, and struck up the hillside. Here the air was strong and scented with the smell of bog myrtle—which a Highlander longs for when he longs for home. Major Hanbury filled his lungs with it, and turned back to look at the house far beneath him, drowsy in the misty September sunshine, and with the cloud-capped hills of Melvin beyond. It was a large stone building, evidently fashioned from the materials of a still older house or castle, whose round tower alone remained standing. The roof was of grey slate, and the massive front, with its square windows, had an air of permanence and strength which suited its rugged surroundings. A boat shoved off from the shore, breaking the sleepy stillness of the bay, and swaying the shadowy reflections through which it cut its way. It was rowed by the girl who had steered him home

last night; she had some fishing-tackle with her, and he could see her in her rough skirt, leaning over the gunwale, holding a wet line in her hand. The youngest sister walked down to the rocks after a few minutes, bare-headed, and with her heavy mane of hair flowing about her; she slipped a cloak from her shoulder, showing some dark bathing-dress beneath, then stood for a moment on a grey boulder jutting out into the sea, her white arms raised above her head, till she plunged with the quietness of an expert diver and disappeared for a moment into the shadowy opalescence of the water. Major Hanbury could hear, in the prevailing stillness of the place, the sound of their voices as they called to each other. The younger girl swam out to the boat and clung to the gunwale for a moment, her bare arms showing beneath their short sleeves, and her mass of hair spread like a cloud of seaweed about her.

A turn in the track which he had chosen wound to the other side of the hill, and hid all human habitation from his eyes. The sense of solitude had something arresting in it, but it was untouched with the sadness which solitude is supposed to engender. Major Hanbury had been at isolated hill stations in India, where the sense of loneliness had been oppressive, almost to the point of physical pain; but on this island of Western Scotland there was a feeling of friendliness which seemed to people

it with familiar comrades. An absurd thought came to him that the girls whom he had heard talk last night had conjured up so many departed heroes by their powers of imagination, that many living, if not tangible, forms had come to people their island, and to be hospitably entertained by them. He laughed as he wondered, not whether King Arthur had lived once, but whether he lived now.

These new friends of his, he said to himself, seemed to draw very little distinction between those who are dead and those who are not. What a world of shadows they lived in! The Lady of Shalott dreaming by her mirror saw at least the reflection of living passers-by, but what had these princesses of the island ever seen? The King of England to-day was not more of a reality to them than the British monarch whose history they knew much better than his. St. Stephen's and Runnymede appeared to be interwoven together in their minds. Did their knights and ladies, he wondered, still ride in tourneys and tilt at Whitehall? Were there queens of beauty and faithful squires? A sense of regret for something that had spoiled London and the world for them came over him. "Will they ever see it," he wondered, "and will they be disappointed?"

The walk up the hillside continued much longer than he was aware of, and he had seldom had a more enjoyable one. He had

many friends, without being a so-called popular man ; but it is very doubtful whether a certain grave and boyish shyness, which he had never entirely overcome, had not made him something of a solitary. His powers of expression were limited to concise orders, or, on very rare occasions, to straight advice, which was generally supposed to be of the unsparing order of things. A desire to be understood had never for a moment remotely entered his mind, and the reserve with which he was accredited was entirely unconscious. As a boy he had been sensitive to a degree that had caused him to suffer intensely, and a shrewish, well-meaning maiden aunt who had brought him up called him stubborn, and honestly tried by her sharp tongue to cure him of his fault. Now, as a distinguished soldier, he found to his surprise that the world was being kind to him. In London he was something of the hero of the day. Women found his habitual quietness interesting, and men knew enough about his character and his military record to be proud of knowing him. Major Hanbury had enjoyed, in a simple-hearted fashion, the almost universal approbation and the welcome which he had received. He was too unspoiled even to consider dinner-parties a bore, and it gave him sincere pleasure, for instance, to find himself in the Row in the morning, meeting friends from every part of the world, who were pleased to turn their horses and ride with him for a space

under the trees. He had hardly entered a theatre or an opera house for years until this spring, on his return from India, and the plays he had seen struck him as being for the most part above the average, while the very friendly atmosphere of his club gave him an honest feeling of pleasure.

He had lived too much alone, however, to be quite in touch with the world, or to be wholly absorbed in it. Nature had always been his friend since his lonely boyhood, and here on the heather-covered hillside, with the sky above him and the sea at his feet, he felt that sort of companionship which crowds could never give him. The sea was grey-blue with deep purple patches in it, the soft air began to stir gently, and the waves showed a little wink of white as they closed their eyes sleepily on the sand. Some small black-faced sheep with long tails turned a curious glance upon him, and effected a short startled run towards the rest of the flock. A pair of alert little wagtails flicked their tails with a cheerful perkiness, and a blackbird of the lawn perched for a moment and flapped his wings like a toy bird wound up for a child's amusement. The happy living things on the hillside were not afraid of him. The peewits calling to each other with their lonely cry, the gulls chattering amongst the yellow seaweed of the shore, and the birds which hardly rose at his approach were old and trusted companions. They had never failed him in the

solitary days of boyhood, when, without being the least aware of it, his heart always had a certain amount of ache in it, and he renewed his acquaintance with them as with old comrades. He plucked a piece of purple heather that grew toughly and bravely on a grey rock near by, and stuck a piece of it into the button-hole of his tweed jacket.

"It is good to be back again," he said to himself, thinking of his many years of foreign service with its monotony at times, but its almost endless variety of experience. He would not have been without the experience or without the responsibility which it had involved, and it struck him oddly to think that in all these years of warfaring and campaigning his brother officer had never once set foot on land outside the island. In the old days, six weeks of grouse shooting with a large party staying in the house was as much attention as he had cared to give the place. Always the most restless of men, the life even of a soldier had not had sufficient variety for him, and he had quitted the service as soon as he came into his fortune. His time was filled with sudden journeys into different parts of the world; and his friends, saying good-bye to him on his departure to shoot big game, would prophesy with unfailing exactness that Graeme would be back again at the end of three months; while for minor journeys it is certain that he took the train for Cairo or Constantinople with

as little concern as other men will show when they get into a passing hansom. He had made friends all over the world, and had always seemed singularly dependent upon being in good company. He could endure hardness, but never dullness. Even when he raced and lost money heavily he felt that the excitement of betting was not too dearly purchased. His chivalry was notorious, and was probably the cause of many of his scrapes. But he had only loved one woman, and his very love for her had brought out the strength, the underlying moroseness, and the undisciplined, stormy, deeply loving nature of his character. Then the tragedy had come. Major Hanbury had been with him throughout his trial. When he was acquitted—the jury, amidst breathless excitement, having decided that it was not from the bullet wound, but from a latent disease, that poor young Stanfield had died—the two friends had stood almost alone in face of the indignation of the public. Charles Hanbury was under orders for India, and he advised his friend to stay and face the music; but Captain Graeme, to whom the condemnation of the world was much worse than death itself, had left suddenly every claim and every interest of his life, and asking only to be forgotten had fled from a position which might well have daunted a braver man.

On the very summit of the hill, surrounded by a loose wall of stones, Major Hanbury

came to the graveyard where Mrs. Graeme was buried. It was a beautiful resting-place, up very close against the sky; and he leaned over the rude tumbling wall, looking at it and thinking of the woman whom they had all loved and respected with that sort of reverent worship which women like Mrs. Graeme seem to inspire. As one of the youngsters of the regiment, he had given a certain loyalty of devotion to her of which not even hot-headed Captain Graeme had been jealous. How lovely she had been! he thought, looking at the heavy slab of grey stone which marked where she lay; how gentle, and how good! Her sweetness of temper and her almost angelic patience had always seemed like something fragrant about her, setting her apart from every common or vulgar thought. And humbly, as he stood beside her grave, Major Hanbury told himself that such sweetness of womanhood and tenderness and faith could not be altogether lost, but must live on somewhere, even if the woman he had known should never wake again from her slumber under the short, sweet-scented grass at his feet. Suddenly he recalled to himself the incident of his arrival last night, when the girl with whom he had sailed home had taken him by the hand as he slipped on the rocks, and had led him all innocently to the door of the house. "It was very nice of her," he said to himself in his plain way. He thanked God for the kindness which he found in the world,

and for the gentle-mannered, good women who were living in it.

He missed his way coming down the hill, and asked it of a shepherd boy who spoke only Gaelic, and looked at the stranger in astonishment; then, finding his bearings somewhat at fault, and the hour advancing towards breakfast, he struck straight down the hill to the little whitewashed manse, and descended to where the minister was digging in his garden. He asked his way of the white-haired old man, who seemed to have heard of his arrival, and, addressing him by name, directed him to the house. As he gained the Roman road again he found a painting-easel stuck in the ground, and a sketching-stool, a tin paint-box, and the other paraphernalia of an artist, and the thought struck him pleasantly that there was no reason why personal property should not be left about in this way on the island where he found himself. Probably no doors were ever locked, and each person knew what the other possessed. He wondered if a policeman had ever set foot in the place, and how he would look if he arrived there.

Madame was an accomplished housekeeper, and the eleven o'clock breakfast was evidence of her skill. Major Hanbury ate with a healthy appetite, and it deprived him of a feeling of anxiety which he had felt over-night to find that Captain Graeme did the same. His conversation in the library with him last evening seemed almost like a dream. To-day, with the full light,

of morning flooding the room, he looked a young man yet. He was thinner than he used to be, but otherwise Major Hanbury saw but little change in him. He believed that his friend had allowed himself to get anxious about his health, but this was doubtless the result of his solitary life. Sir Matthew Fergusson, when he should arrive, might think that his visit was uncalled for; but he was in Scotland at the present moment, and it was just as well that Captain Graeme's fancies about himself should be set at rest.

The following day was Sunday, and over-night Major Hanbury had seen Duncan Mackenzie come into the drawing-room and remove from every table in the room the books that lay scattered there. He ranged them on a shelf, and presently brought and disposed in their places a number of volumes such as Major Hanbury connected in his mind with old-fashioned tales of the Highlands or some Scottish manse. Here were Josephus, and Law's "Serious Call," "The Westminster Confession of Faith," Baxter's "Saints' Rest," a book about the Covenanters, and Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying," and some odd little volumes with quaint titles which he read, not without a smile of amusement on his face. He noticed the habit of every one in the house, both servants and mistresses, of placing the Bible in respectful isolation. No other book was ever laid on the top of it, and once when Madame had inadvertently

placed a book of fiction which she had been reading on the sacred volume, he saw Duncan gravely lift it up and lay it on another table.

Major Hanbury, being an Englishman, had heard of many old-fashioned customs, supposed now to be archaic, in connection with the keeping of the Scottish Sabbath, and he had also heard various humorous tales on the subject; but he had had too many good Highlanders in his own regiment, who had stood by him in difficult situations, not to know that their faith was a deeply rooted thing, and that their Sabbath-keeping had developed some fine, stern qualities in them. He wondered what the old church on the island would be like, and how a day which had begun so seriously in respect of literature would be passed. He was glad afterwards, at a time when he was as nearly heartbroken as it is possible for a man to be, that he had spent that tranquil Sunday up in the Highlands.

Nature itself seemed quieter than usual, and there was hardly a ripple on the water. Some big white sea-gulls flying low touched its unbroken surface delicately with their wings; the sea-weed floated lazily in the clear depths below the rocks, or lay on the shore with something of the melancholy of those who are left behind—resting, but not content. Sea-pinks lifted their sturdy heads amongst the short fine grass in the crevices of the rocks, and sea-

birds spoke to each other with a confidential chuckle, humorously suggestive of human speech. A grey mistiness brooded over the island, and was undisturbed by even a breath of wind, and in the essential peace and stillness every note of birds was audible. The gentle dropping of the autumn leaves had nothing regretful in it, but seemed full of resignation, like calm old age; the blue smoke from the peat fires in the cottages rose in straight columns from the chimneys above the thatch; a hare, leaping across a field of turnips, seemed as little hurried as the rest of the world; and the fishing-boats hardly rocked down close by the shore. But there was an element of something more than mere peace and restfulness about the day; there was a certain faithfulness and devoutness, and a suggestion of sober goodness and pure and high purpose which remained long with him. He used to think of it afterwards in the midst of war and disaster and danger and disappointment, and there was something enduring and ennobling in the remembrance of it and of its brooding quiet.

There was a sense of hush even over the daily duties of the house, and the servants came and went more quietly than usual. He thought of all that he had heard of the long-faced Puritans, and of the hopeless dreariness of the Scottish Sabbath; but he believed now that those who thus spoke of it must have missed a good deal of what he found in it.

A single bell, not particularly tuneful, rang for service in the kirk, and he saw some aged couples wending their slow way past the stone dyke and along the Roman road to the plain undecorated building. Later, when the bell began to "jow in," some young women, walking with a sense of hurry or shyness, and with a suggestion of Sunday finery about them, went down the road, and a few young men in common suits, less picturesque than their everyday homespuns or fishing-jerseys, assembled in the kirkyard. The minister, silver-haired and patriarchal, walked up the pathway to the humble door of the kirk, and gravely saluted the young men in their Sunday blacks as he passed.

Madame conducted her own devotions at home, but Captain Graeme and his daughters occupied a pew in the gallery of the church, and Major Hanbury accompanied them thither. He was fain to admit that the service was more of a religious exercise than any of those which he had lately attended in London. There were no aids to worship, no gently shaded lights, no painted glass, rolling organ or sweet-singing choir. A red-haired precentor sitting beneath the pulpit led the praises of the congregation, and lifted the tune with the help of a tuning-fork. The stones of the aisles were uncarpeted, and the doors of the high-back pews creaked as the several members of the congregation opened and shut them. The quality of

enjoyment in the service was absent. Here were a handful of Scottish peasants whose views of life were austere, and whose creed, perhaps, was grim ; and an aged minister, who, whatever his faults as a steward may have been, bade no one take his bill and write less than the score which they owed their Lord. His was no easy doctrine, and any one less used than his flock were to the old man who had lived for years amongst them might have called him too stern a preacher. Charles Hanbury had often heard evil called good, but more often he had heard it called natural. Mr. Macdonald not only called it evil, but he called it punishable. The wrath of God was ever before him, and sin would be visited with penalty whether it was due to heredity or to the natural frailty of human nature or to mere heedlessness. When he preached his sermon he was like some prophet on fire for the Lord ; his old eyes blazed and his cheeks flushed. No crowded city church had ever heard his eloquence or had been moved by his appeal, but he had never abated one jot of the claim of his message. He preached long and he preached eloquently, using phrases from time to time which showed that he was a scholar, and one, moreover, who was deeply read in theology. The congregation sat immovable ; their daily utterances were often formed unconsciously on the eloquence of the minister, and they used phrases which it might have astonished a stranger to have

heard from unscholarly lips. No one in the church seemed to be inattentive, and hardly a foot moved, save at a pause in the sermon. Major Hanbury saw a boy in one of the pews below him get a sharp rap on the head from his father for gazing about him. Outside, through the unstained windows of the building, he could see the quiet waters of the bay where the stone landing-stage was, and the sun breaking through some misty clouds touched the ripple with pure gold, and lighted up the flaming berries of the rowan trees. The mists lay lovingly, caressing and soft on the Melvin hills ; but the heather on the nearer shore was a glowing royal purple in the sun, and a bird sang suddenly loud and clear as it perched upon a crumbling gravestone under the window. The sun smote full and strong on the bare church with its whitewashed walls and stone floors, and turned Helen Graeme's brown hair to gold. She raised her strong eyes towards it, and looked upwards for a moment at the blue sky that had appeared overhead, and as she did so Major Hanbury thought that he had never seen a finer face.

"Being our father's friend," said Jean, the following day, "your time, of course, will be principally engaged with him ; but there is so much that we want to ask you about in the world, that it would be a great pleasure to us if you would be with us sometimes."

Madame interposed, and asked him to have

tea with herself and the young ladies when he should return from his grouse shooting in the afternoon.

He discovered later that no one knew better than the girls where grouse were to be found, and there was a saying amongst the fishermen on the island that if there was a fish in the sea Miss Helen would get it. Major Hanbury began to wonder why it was that sport for ladies had often been connected with something masculine and unnatural. To-day he thought that the sight of a woman with a long, slender fishing-rod in her hand, lightly throwing flies into a trout pool, had something about it of the gracefulness of a measured dance. Helen was his guide, for he had chosen to fish instead of to shoot, and he walked with her down the Roman road and up the burn-side to the pool where the trout were to be found. She talked less than most of the girls he had known, but her silence was like that of some younger brother, to whom the art of making conversation has not yet revealed itself as a duty. She was still careful of his footsteps, directing him where to avoid a piece of boggy ground, or showing him the firmest stepping-stones in the burn; but when they began to talk of birds and fishes they were on common ground. She knew where the heron down on the lonely shore had its tumbled, untidy, picturesque nest, and could tell each call that shy startled animals give to each other, and could show him the home

of the maukin and the nest of the whaup. In speaking about out-of-door things he noticed that she often used a Scottish word instead of an English one, and once or twice she slipped into the Gaelic speech where English failed to express her meaning. Her friendliness had a simplicity in it which recalled to him oddly the confidence of the sea-birds down on the shore which he had watched that morning. He thought that the white gulls, calm in their liberty of wings, moved with as serene a flight and with as little self-consciousness as the girl beside him spoke and uttered her thoughts to him.

She had asked him to tell her of the frontier warfare which had brought him fame, and he had tried to do so, without, it is true, much skill in description, and with some military details not easily understood; and then he found that there was hardly a turn in the affairs of the campaign with which she was not familiar, and that some difficulties, which had certainly not been recognised by the authorities at home, were eagerly seized upon by her.

"And when you took the fort without firing a shot," she said, "you were like Joshua—the walls of the city fell down flat before you. We knew then, if we had ever doubted it, that you led your armies under the God of Israel."

"It was a very small army," he said smiling—"so small that there was every chance that we might have had the worst of it; indeed, at one

time it looked more than likely that we should never get into the fort."

"We prayed nightly for victory for your arms," said Helen.

"I wish I had known," he said thoughtfully. It touched him more than he could conveniently express to think of the girls kneeling night by night in the great stone hall of their house praying for him. The expedition to the hill fort had always been called a one-man job.

"Thank you very much for your prayers," he said.

They had reached the plain stone doorway of the house as they were speaking, and found tea waiting for them within by a fire of logs. Afterwards Madame read aloud in French, while Helen, with head bent, sat close to a lamp tying fishing flies, and there was the tap of Agatha's treadle as she spun at her wheel, which mingled pleasantly with the French lady's reading. Jean had some knitting in her hands; it seemed that it was the pleasure of the daughters of the house, in the autumn and winter evenings, to card the wool from the Highland sheep into great soft bundles on the floor, and then to spin it on their wheels and weave it into homespun webs on a loom which he had noticed in one of the rooms.

Captain Graeme appeared at dinner-time, and apologised to his guest for seeing so little of him during the day. "The first of the cold weather," he said briefly, "always tries me a

good deal." But he talked throughout dinner as usual, and seemed to enjoy his friend's society. Afterwards, when the two men were in the library alone, he asked in what part of Scotland Sir Matthew Fergusson was then staying, and what was the earliest date at which it was likely he would be able to visit the island.

"I still believe I have only bad indigestion," he said; "but even indigestion is disagreeable, and you remember, Charles, that I was always something of a coward about pain."

He had a hundred things to show his old friend: a picture which he had bought at the Selton collection that winter just after his uncle died and left him his fortune; a curious piece of inlay work and some unset jewels which had been intended as a necklace for his wife. He wandered restlessly from one thing to another in the room, bringing out from a storehouse of drawers and cabinets treasures new and old, and last of all he drew aside a silk curtain, pendant on the wall, and showed beneath it a portrait of his wife. Charles Hanbury remembered the sensation the picture had made years ago when it was exhibited at the Academy. The artist had caught Mrs. Graeme's expression by an extraordinarily sympathetic and clever piece of work, and had made his name and fame by it. Charles remembered standing with a crowd of other people at Burlington House trying to see the portrait above the heads of the many persons who crowded to stare at it

Captain Graeme was the envy of half the world then.

A lamp burned above the picture, and he turned it up after he had drawn back the curtain. The two men looked at the portrait for a few moments without speaking. Major Hanbury was never ready of speech, and was more especially inclined to silence when he felt deeply, and Captain Graeme had acquired reserve in the same way that some men acquire stoicism—by sheer endurance. He seemed afraid of words, and perhaps the younger man's silence was more welcome to him than speech would have been. He turned the lamp low again, and drew the curtain across the picture.

"There is not an hour of my life," he said, "in which I do not miss her."

He sat up late, talking more than he had done for years. As the hour drew to midnight they still sat together in the library. Scenes were recalled of pleasant Ascot days, dinners at some inn on the river, visits to country houses. Captain Graeme began to speak with the impetuosity of his former self. Several times he laughed, unexpectedly but almost joyously, and then as suddenly relapsed into silence. He did not join his daughters when he heard the murmur of evening prayers from the hall, but kept his guest with him in the library, recalling a hundred stories which Major Hanbury had almost forgotten. It was as though a voice, for fifteen years silent,

had begun to speak again, and had taken up the conversation just where it had ceased. The years on the island were not even referred to. A deep colour burned in Captain Graeme's cheeks, but his nervous hands were still cold. The good looks which had been conspicuous in him as a younger man were not much diminished, and his figure, always erect and tall, had almost a look of youth in it to-night. This talk about long ago was making him young again. Captain Graeme was back in London enjoying the mirth and the gaiety of it all, and getting more pleasure into one evening than other men could cram into a week, turning night into day, burning the candle at both ends, and laughing at law and order. He would hardly let his friend leave him, even when the small hours of the morning had struck. "I can't sleep, Charles," he said pitifully, "so what is the use of going to bed?"

"You were always a restless fellow," said Major Hanbury kindly. "I never remember your having a good night's sleep in your life."

"But then," said Captain Graeme quickly, "I had many things to think about; now I have only one. If you ever feel inclined to blame me for betting pretty wildly, you might try and remember that a man cannot think of one thing only without going mad." He seemed to touch in this way, from time to time, the single topic which absorbed his thoughts without ever actually giving expression to it. Fifteen

years of silence had raised a barrier which was difficult to break down. "Good-night!" he said at last, leaving, as it seemed, much that he wanted to say unspoken.

Even when his guest had gone to his room he entered for a moment to ask hospitably if he had everything he wanted; and then, setting his candle on a table, he came over to the hearth and, with a characteristic movement, began warming his hands by the fire. He repeated more than once some conventional solicitations for his friend's comfort, looking round at the unfamiliar chamber, and saying in excuse for himself that these rooms being never used he could not say whether they were habitable sleeping-apartments or not.

Major Hanbury reassured him; he had an undefined feeling in his mind that Captain Graeme was afraid to go to his room, and to be left alone, and he brought up a chair to the fire of logs with the intention of letting him know that he was not in a hurry to get rid of him. Captain Graeme accepted the chair gratefully, and sank into it. There was deep silence for some time afterwards, and Major Hanbury began to think of going to bed and leaving his friend to have a doze in the arm-chair. He had known cases where, if a man's heart was affected, he found a sitting attitude more easy than lying down; but he still had that curious, undefined feeling that Captain Graeme was afraid of his own room or of his

own company. He began to put some more logs noiselessly on the fire, and then saw that his friend was wide awake, and was looking at him with eyes unusually bright as he leaned forward in his chair and began to speak unexpectedly.

"I often think she calls me, Charles," he said, "in the night-time. I seem to hear her voice coming to me from up there on the hill, and in the winter, when I think of her lying all cold and lonely under the snow, I cannot stay in bed or by the fire; I go and sit with her till dawn comes."

"Perhaps she knows that," Major Hanbury said comfortingly. He was a man of simple faith.

"I think she does," said Captain Graeme.

"Still, you know," said the other in his kindly fashion, "I believe you should stop talking now and try to get some sleep. If Sir Matthew is coming, and you don't feel well, you should get all the rest you can."

"I think I shall ask Sir Matthew not to come," said Captain Graeme restlessly; "no one comes here. We are forgotten; let us remain forgotten. You never chatter, my silent friend; but other people do."

He bade him good-night at last, going away to his own room with his candle. The wind rose high towards morning, and who knows but that in its plaintive utterance and its lonely wailing about the solitary house he heard again

with twofold insistence the calling of his dead wife's voice? Be that as it may, he had gone to her, and they found him at dawn the next morning lying dead within the little stone wall which guarded the churchyard on the hill.

The great physician, who arrived the same day, could account for his death quite naturally. His heart was diseased—diseased perhaps in more ways than one, had the great physician known it—and the climb up the steep path on the hillside had strained the worn and much-tried organ beyond its frail strength. He must have felt faint in those early morning hours, which even to the strongest may bring their own sense of weakness; and, feeling his strength failing him, he had stooped to shelter from the wind behind the wall, and then had lain down exhausted beside the lonely mound where for years he had wished to lie.

CHAPTER IV

MAJOR HANBURY had little idea when he came to re-visit his old friend that his business for the next few months would be intimately associated with the island where for the first time he found himself. He stayed till the funeral was over. A long train of servants and retainers, of hoary-headed fishermen and bearded Highlanders, followed the laird's body to lay it for the last time, where it doubtless often had lain, on the solitary hill-top. There was a little pathway visible amongst the heather and the grass which his feet had worn on their many journeys there, and now Captain Graeme would not again return to the house which for him had had always a sense of emptiness in it. It was a still grey day in autumn when they buried him, and the beauty of the scene, with all its sadness, imparted a sense of peace which nothing could disturb. After years of sleepless nights and waking remorse Captain Graeme slept well.

His daughters followed the little procession up the hillside—to say that they attended the funeral would suggest a formality wholly absent from the scene. The black dresses

which Madame had ordered for them would probably not arrive for some days, and they were dressed, as he had first seen them, in their dark green tartan, with the broad black ribbons in their hair. The dignity of their sorrow had something impressive in it. Helen's head was thrown back, and one felt that for her a hero had joined a band of heroes in a Valhalla of her imagination, more real, perhaps, and infinitely nearer than the heaven of some orthodox thinkers. Agatha's face looked whiter than usual, and she clung to the elder sister's hand as she walked. Jean helped Madame up the steep ascent; her head was bent, and her cap drawn down over her eyes. The minister, with his white hair and beard, recalling some picture of an ancient saint of old days, read a simple form of words beside the grave, and the elders of the little kirk, some serving-men, and Major Hanbury lowered the coffin into the heather-lined grave. The rough hingeless gate, which had been removed to allow the coffin to pass through, was placed again in its old position, and a new pile of brown earth was heaped beside the green mound where Mrs. Graeme rested. Then the minister and the train of mourners, all still bare-headed, stood with bent heads, while the piper fixed his reeds, and on the stillness of the air was borne the sound of "The Graemes' Lament." Duncan walked slowly as he played, and made once the whole circuit of the stone dyke which

surrounded the graveyard; then he stood beside the gate and finished the plaintive air to the last note, placed the pipes with their tartan ribbons under his arm, and strode away down the hillside without speaking.

Major Hanbury walked with the minister to the manse, and asked leave to stay with him till the evening. The girls, he thought, would like to be alone; but he had hardly realised with what simple kindness they regarded him, and how little irksome his company would have been to them. Helen herself opened the hall door to him on his knock when he returned in the evening, and taking his hand in hers, "We have missed you very much," she said. Their grief was silent, restrained, unostentatious. Some old servants had drawn the blinds of the house during the time its master lay dead within, but his daughters had been for the most part far away on the hillside, or out in their boat at sea, striving, who knows, poor children! to find some comfort, where alone comfort seemed possible, in familiar things. Of the conventionalities of grief they knew nothing at all: death was a mystery, and they were trying to understand it in their own way. They liked to be much with the old minister at this time, because by his office he would seem to know most about the place to which their father had lately made his long journey; but they often spoke of him, too, to their guest in the house, bringing to him their difficulties or revealing

a faith which, while it profoundly stirred him, served to deepen his chivalry towards them.

By Captain Graeme's will he had made his friend Charles Hanbury sole executor, and he, guessing that a lawyer's visit might be unwelcome to the grief-stricken household, left them a day or two later to return to London to put their affairs in order. Helen sailed the boat across to Melvin as she had done when she came to meet him, and she bade him good-bye in her grave fashion, which he found more convincing than any conventional expressions of regret for his departure.

"I will write," he said, "as soon as I have seen the lawyer, and when you reply perhaps you will let me know how you and your sisters are getting on. If ever I can do anything for you," he added, with a sincerity which gave weight to his words, "you will promise to let me know."

Major Hanbury would probably have told you in after years that one of the worst experiences of his life was when, having gone into Captain Graeme's affairs with the lawyers, he discovered that there was absolutely nothing left of his fortune. Graeme had not only betted and lost enormous sums, but his outstanding debts were very large, and his investments, at which he had never even glanced for fifteen years, had depreciated in many cases to half their value during that time, while a very large portion of

his capital had been realised in order to pay his racing debts. The situation from a financial point of view was as grave as it could well be. The lawyer himself had had no idea of the disastrous state of his client's affairs.

"Probably," he said, at the end of many days of investigation, "we may have just enough in hand to settle the claims, but Captain Graeme's daughters will have to depend for their support upon whether the island can be let or not."

"They will have to leave the island?" questioned Major Hanbury.

"Undoubtedly," said the lawyer, "unless they have means of their own, which I understand they have not."

Major Hanbury did not often ask useless questions, but he found himself saying helplessly, "Can nothing be done?"

"The island can be let, I suppose?" said the lawyer; "there is grouse-shooting upon it, and a few farms, and the house is in good order, you say. Probably we shall get five hundred a year for it, at least, and the young ladies will have to try to live on that."

"If there was another house on the island to which they could go," said Major Hanbury, "they might live there very simply with their companion; but I fear there is nothing of the kind."

"Lady Parfield, whom you mentioned just now," said Mr. Grieve, "seems to be their only near relative, and the first thing to be done

will be to communicate with her at once, and see if she feels inclined to offer the Miss Graemes a home."

Major Hanbury went to see Lady Parfield himself. He found her at home in an old-fashioned, rather ugly house in Onslow Gardens. She was a stout woman, with a tight gown and a sympathetic manner, and an immense quantity of white hair dressed in an elaborate fashion. Her manner seemed to him faintly suggestive of a superior house-keeper; but he heard that she was a woman fairly well connected, whom life in a provincial town had somewhat vulgarised. She had married, while still a good-looking girl, an Irish peer nearly seventy years of age, of whom she always spoke with the profoundest respect, while she cherished the title which he had bequeathed to her—having, indeed, very little else to bequeath. Lady Parfield's title was probably her most valued possession. She never thought of relinquishing it when she married Captain Graeme's brother, and she had an ingenious way of recounting her conversations with her friends, or even with shop-people, in which she frequently repeated her valuable prefix. According to her, it had gained for her unusual privileges all her life.

Her manner to Major Hanbury was cordial, if a trifle effusive. She came forward to meet him, in her plush-covered, common drawing-

room, in a manner which was as nearly as possible suggestive of an embrace. "Those poor darlings!" she murmured from time to time, when he had told his tale; "it was wicked and cruel of my brother-in-law to keep them in that desolate island far away from us all."

"They seemed very happy there," said Major Hanbury.

"Oh, bless you!" said Lady Parfield, "no girl is really happy fishing or boating, or anything of the sort; she wants to be in the world, enjoying herself."

"We were wondering, their lawyer and I," said Major Hanbury, with the ingenuous boldness of the single-minded man, "whether you might not be able to receive them here for the present."

Lady Parfield behaved as well as could possibly be expected of her when this bomb-shell was thrown, as it were, into her midst. In describing to various friends afterwards the episode of Major Hanbury's extraordinary request, she could only say that she felt "flabbergasted." "Have them here?" she repeated, and then again, with excusable foolishness of iteration—"have all three girls here?" She could not for a moment think of anything else to say. Mechanically she reached out her hand for a fire-screen, and fanned herself.

At the end of a few minutes Major Hanbury began to deem that his embassy was unsuc-

cessful, and he had almost made up his mind to take up his hat and depart. But Lady Parfield was proverbially a popular woman who always did the kind thing, and she had a heart as kind as living in Onslow Gardens, paying rent, and keeping up appearances on twelve hundred pounds a year will allow. Before condemning any one we should try and find out the extent of his or her income. On a few thousands a year Lady Parfield's character might have blossomed. If it occasionally showed a mean growth, it must be remembered that she lived habitually amongst those whose incomes far exceeded her own ; while to her credit, be it said, her little luncheons and dinners never fell far below theirs in point of appearance, even if the chicken *pâtés* were made of rabbit.

She held Major Hanbury by a movement of the hand, and replacing the fire-screen, she said, with an admirable air of common sense, "I am a woman of business." Without much effort one could imagine her making the same remark on every occasion when the disbursement of money was suggested. To be a woman of business was doubtless a synonymous term for looking after her own interests as sharply as necessity, and perhaps a slight tendency to parsimony, admitted. At the same time it must be frankly confessed that to have a visit from three unknown girls suddenly suggested to one is apt momentarily to take away the breath.

"Helen is my goddaughter," she began.

"I used often to write to her when she was younger, and I also spoke very strongly to her father about having her confirmed."

"They belong to the Scottish Church, I believe," said Major Hanbury, in a manner that Lady Parfield told herself was inclined to be short.

"Anything like Dissent would be greatly against them in the world—it is very middle-class."

Major Hanbury did not pursue the subject.

"I might have Helen here for a time," said Lady Parfield waveringly. She enjoyed the position which she held in her little world. There was always a sort of bachelor freedom about the tastelessly furnished house, with its plush chairs and highly glazed wallpapers, and she enjoyed having it to herself. Lady Parfield was popular and broad-minded. Her religion and her black velvet mantle exactly corresponded—she wore them both on Sundays; but underneath the mantle there was a youthful-looking light silk blouse, and underneath her religion there was a certain jollity which enjoyed a racy story, and could always find excuses for a sinner, and could even be charitable to those in rags. She claimed a wide knowledge of humanity, and was wont to say that she thoroughly understood men, giving as evidence of her success with them that she had buried two husbands. Lady Parfield talked much of these departed gentlemen; but just as she

believed that only suitable people should meet each other, so it seemed that she made a very distinct difference between the company to whom she introduced their memories. The late Lord Parfield, a man of Low Church tendencies and strict evangelical principles, was always alluded to as "poor Parfield! I think I see him now." Her future meeting with the lamented peer in Paradise was frequently spoken of, and was deemed secure—he had "passed away," while Archibald had merely died. He was always given as Lady Parfield's authority for refusing to take part in such heterodox affairs as the holding of a bazaar-stall in aid of some undenominational charity; or was referred to on Sunday afternoons when the black velvet mantle clothed her redundant form, and her mind was pleasantly influenced by the Sunday morning's sermon.

At other times the memory of the late Archibald Graeme—the "man of the world," as she called him—was an ample apology for enjoyment such as the earlier memory might have condemned. Lady Parfield, when she read somewhat dubious novels—for the sake of their pure Saxon English—always gave as her reason for doing so that she had lived for years with a master mind. In the same way she felt that she was paying a tribute to Archibald as a man of letters when she attended first nights at the theatres. And even when others might find a play unpleasant in character,

she always said and felt that she put herself outside the ordinary or squeamish class of thinkers, by reason of the strong mental education which had been hers through the agency of Archibald ; and when that failed to convince she was wont to say that the play was the best sermon in London. There is no doubt about it that she was a good widow, both to the husband in Paradise and to the broad-minded thinker who was living "somewhere, we know not where," and her utilitarian mind could find use, not to say occupation, for both of them.

She had not quite decided which to introduce to Major Hanbury ; but his remarks, made without any appearance of condemnation, about the Presbyterian church, coupled with the fact that Lord Parfield had the higher rank, determined her to bring his name first into the conversation.

"My poor, dear first husband, Lord Parfield," she said, "would, I know, like me to do what I could for the girls, especially in the way of guiding or controlling them. One must not shrink from these duties and responsibilities, Major Hanbury."

"I quite see that," said Major Hanbury, without, however, adding the words of praise which Lady Parfield was inclined to think her little speech deserved.

"But of course," she said, "we must look at these things from a practical aspect. My

income will not allow me to have many guests, however much I may desire it."

Major Hanbury had been absent from England for a considerable number of years, but he thought with hesitation that he had heard of visitors as paying guests, and he mentioned the fact with much diffidence to Lady Parfield.

"Of course, there would have to be some arrangement," she said quickly, if vaguely. She always discussed business matters with good taste, and she and her friends habitually alluded to the hardest bargain as an "arrangement."

"But the island has not even been let yet," she appended, with a slight knitting of the brows. "One doesn't even know that those poor, unfortunate girls have got sixpence in the world."

"We have had an offer for the island of three hundred pounds a year," said Major Hanbury. "At present we do not feel inclined to accept it, as we think a larger one is much nearer what the place is worth. Still, the Miss Graemes cannot have less than a hundred a year each, and we certainly hope that they may have as much as two hundred. The grouse-shooting at Arvan is excellent, and there is fishing, too; but the objection, of course, which every one raises, is that it is so inaccessible."

"I believe," said Lady Parfield, "that three guineas a week is the very lowest amount that any one pays in London for board and lodging."

And Major Hanbury was reminded of the superior housekeeper again.

"I confidently hope that they will be able to pay that," he said. "And, of course, the"—he hesitated for a word, and then used the one that seemed especially coined for Lady Parfield—"the arrangement need only be temporary. You understand that, coming as strangers to London, your nieces must have somewhere to go."

"They are only nieces by marriage," amended her ladyship.

"I know," he said gravely. Without being fully conscious of his thought, he yet had an undefined feeling of pleasure in the fact that the princesses of the island were not blood relations of this lady to whom he spoke.

Lady Parfield, meanwhile, was reflecting that the distinguished soldier, of whom she had heard much, was not easy to get on with. She wished she had not had to discuss business with him, and yet, otherwise, she said to herself optimistically, she might never have known him at all. She meant to ask him to her luncheons, and to invite a few well-chosen people to meet him, and already she had mentally arranged a suitable little party. Lady Parfield had an enormous list of acquaintances, and many friends. She frequently said that she saw no difference at all, except in the matter of real goodness, between any classes of persons. Her rank was gracefully waived, with almost

a socialistic touch, when she was in company with those inferior to herself. Her house was a happy meeting-ground for persons of every degree of rank, and introductions were freely given and many new acquaintances made amongst those who attended her well-arranged parties.

"You will think me a greedy old woman," she said frankly to Major Hanbury, "but I am going to be perfectly candid with you. I have about twelve hundred a year, and I cannot even afford to go abroad in the spring unless I let the house. I pay my bills, where other people perhaps leave theirs unpaid, and there will be nothing owing but the weekly accounts at my death. Still, living as I do, I have heaps of expenses, and I cannot afford anything more."

"We must try and think of some other plan," said Major Hanbury.

"No, no!" cried Lady Parfield; "I'll write and tell them to come here, pending other plans. It is a quiet time of year, and they will be in mourning, so there will be no entertaining, and we must just look about and see what can be done later. It is only a temporary plan."

Major Hanbury thanked her. Later, he was offered a cup of tea, or even a whisky and soda, if he preferred it, and cigarettes were handed to him as a matter of course. The house re-assumed its air of bachelor jollity, discreetly tempered by the memory of the late Lord Parfield, and his widow was at her best again,

Major Hanbury was begged not to go, and several other people dropped in at tea-time, to whom he was elaborately introduced—even a humble friend who came unexpectedly was not neglected. Lady Parfield was popular with rich and poor, and there were times when she was almost aggressively amiable to shabby friends. The sensitive mind on these occasions might even feel that they were part of the scheme of Lady Parfield's good-heartedness, and that they were being shown off as objects of her broad-minded amiability.

"I am the most un-snobby person that ever lived!" she used to say, and many people believed her.

"I'll write to-night," she said to Major Hanbury, as she pressed his hand in both of hers when he rose to go. And when the door had closed upon him, she gave to her friends every particular of his history and of her beloved nieces' loss of fortune. Before she dressed for dinner (Lady Parfield nearly always dined out) she sat down and penned a letter which Helen Graeme received three days later, when the Highland postman sailed over from Melvin to the island.

"My poor, motherless darlings," wrote Lady Parfield, "my heart bleeds for you and for all that you have suffered during the past few weeks. I have seen none of you since you were babies, but that, as you know, was not my fault, and I can only say that any nieces of

my beloved Archibald must be very dear to me. I saw Major Hanbury to-day, and he told me of your loss of fortune, and that you are obliged to leave the island. This, I am sure, will be a blessing in disguise, for even though it may be a wrench to leave your old home, there is, after all, nothing like the world of London, as you will find when you come to know it.

"What your plans will be in the future must, I suppose, remain very obscure for the present; but, meantime, come, all three of you, straight to me." Lady Parfield made a full stop, and then debated for nearly five minutes, with a troubled expression on her face. Last of all, she pressed the point of her pen on the full-stop, and flicking it off again, she made it into a comma, and then on the same line she added the words, "as soon as the island is let."

"I must fence myself round a little bit," she said to herself; "men never seem to think of these things, especially when it is a case of maidens in distress." She added a few lines of real sympathy and almost motherly kindness, and remained "her dear nieces' ever affectionate aunt, S. Parfield."

But even when the letter was sealed she was not absolutely satisfied with it; she lifted the gummed edges of the envelope with a paper-knife, unfolded her note, and added, "we can arrange all the financial part when I see you." It must be admitted that the question of

terms could not have been more delicately suggested.

Major Hanbury was himself staying on the island when Lady Parfield's letter arrived. The news of the Miss Graemes' loss of fortune seemed to him too untoward a piece of intelligence to make to them by letter. Had it only meant that they were poor, he believed that that would have been to them a small matter ; but it meant exile also. And this soldier, who had known years of exile, knew better than most people, perhaps, what this might mean to them. He had arrived yesterday, and the same evening it had been his difficult task to convey to three young girls, to whom even the current coinage of the realm was as little known as it could possibly be to any one in His Majesty's dominions, not only the fact that they were practically penniless, but that their loss of fortune was due to their father's carelessness and to his passion for gambling.

Poor children ! They had many ideas of how they might economise up there in the North ! To the young and healthy-minded poverty has few terrors. But when Major Hanbury broke to them as gently as he could the fact that they must leave the island altogether—the rest of the world being absolutely unknown to them—they were bewildered at first. They thanked him, with the courtesy which seemed to be their natural heritage, for having himself come to break the news to them ; and then, with a

a sort of old-fashioned dignity in acceptance of what fate sent them, they listened to all he had to say about their future. It touched Major Hanbury to find how entirely they believed that he was doing his best for them, and with what loyalty they put their future in his hands.

"I believe," he said with difficulty, "that you will have to go to Lady Parfield. At present there seems to be no other plan."

"London would have been impossible if a friend had not been raised up for us," said Helen.

He could quite easily imagine her one of the Scottish women-martyrs of long ago, of noble spirit and calmness, bound to a stake on the shore while the waves lapped round her; but it smote him with a horrible sense of something jarring, discordant, and almost grotesque to think of her in the world of London, and in the cheerful, common, bachelor establishment in Onslow Gardens.

When the conference in the library was over, the sisters uttered no vain protests nor asked foolish questions, and he realised thankfully how easy they had made his painful task for him. He saw them wander up the hillside together, and he always thought afterwards that they had spent a dark hour in their lives in some stern fight which seemed to have set its seal on their faces when they descended again to the house. Jean only had a question

to put to him, and he imagined that she was speaking on behalf of the other two also, when she came to him as he sat by the fire of logs in the hall in the chill of the late autumn afternoon, and said, speaking with a directness which characterised her, "My father used to gain a great deal of money by racing, used he not?"

"I am afraid he did not," said Major Hanbury.

"He did not often win?"

A cleverer or more adroit person would have found some way out of giving a direct answer; Major Hanbury could only say simply, "Not very often."

Jean turned away, and he knew that the hardest part of the blow had now been given to her and her sisters by him. In the evening, when he heard Helen read with a steady voice, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," he felt that it was not an easy task that his old friend had bequeathed to him.

CHAPTER V

THE Island of Arvan was let eventually for the sum of £400 a year. The African diamond merchant who took it, and who had at first offered £300, was far longer deciding to pay the full rent than he was in deciding to take a box at the opera or in buying a piece of silver plate. But then, as he said, there was no deer-stalking on the island, and this was what he suddenly appeared to be looking for, as soon as ever he had discovered that Arvan did not boast a deer forest. He would probably keep the place up well, and would, he also said, bring a bit of money to the miserable crofters there. All things considered, and no other offers being forthcoming, the agreement was signed, and Mr. Lionel Schumacher became the Miss Graemes' tenant, and from thenceforth always signed himself in the Scottish fashion, "Of Arvan." He arrived with an immense number of servants, a yacht, and a French *chef*, and from that day forward every one on the island charged him exactly double its worth for the produce which they brought to the "big hoose." "Gleds dinna pick oot gleds' e'en," says the old proverb, but

it would have been tempting Providence to let the African gentleman have things at their proper price. He paid his bills in a lordly fashion, while admitting that he found everything in the north far dearer than he expected; and he gave dances in the servants' hall of the house, and eventually built a small recreation room with a tin roof, upon the island. The Highlanders came sometimes to the entertainments which were held there, "juist tae please puir Schumacher"; but they always wondered what they were meant to do in a building which was "no a kirk and no a hoose."

Mr. Schumacher ran the place well, to use his own expression, and he even improved the roads, tearing away the moss and the blue-bells and the ferns from the old Roman way, and putting a neat wire fence to augment the crumbling stone dyke which he believed afforded no protection at all. Excellent man! His father had slept beside his gun night after night when, as a miner, he had tried his fortune at New Rush, where men were selling for a bottle of whisky a piece of ground in which perhaps a fortune in diamonds was made the following day. His son never could understand or realise that anywhere his purse and his silver plate were safe, and in the sea-girt island the windows and doors of his house were barred every night as though he were in his father's tin shanty at New Rush again.

Helen Graeme received him herself when

he came to take possession, honoured him as though he had been a guest, and bade him welcome in her grave royal way. "The island is yours, sir," she said, "while our fortunes are fallen. We pray that you may love it, and the people, and find good entertainment here."

Mr. Schumacher thanked her. He had seen a large number of agents and landlords since he had begun to look about for a shooting in Scotland, and he always felt that he was in some sort conferring a favour by offering his money for some heather-covered hillside, or a lonely loch or moorland, which might be picturesque enough, but "did not bring in a penny." To-night as he dined at Arvan House he almost began to wonder if he had given enough for the place. Still, the young ladies could not be so poor as every one said they were; the eldest one's pearls alone would fetch a fortune at Christie's, and their old-fashioned gowns were made of the richest materials.

"I don't think I'll be here very much," he said nervously. "I have my business to attend to, and I never care to be very long away from London; and I'm sure if you or your sisters would ever care to come back and see the place you would be very welcome."

Would one care to return for a week to Paradise, and then go back to earth again?

"And if it is not convenient to you," said Mr. Schumacher, "I hope you and the French lady won't hurry away from the island."

He found that they were leaving on the following day. Madame was to return to France, and the servants and tenants about the place were to remain with the new landlord. Duncan alone was not amongst the pitiful, weeping crowd who stood on the rocky shore the following morning, watching the Miss Graemes sail away to unknown England with all its terrors and its many dangers. He played the "Lament" while the farewells were being spoken, and until Helen Graeme had stepped into her boat and taken her place at the tiller for the last time. It then appeared that besides his larger encumbrance of the pipes, he had a very small valise in his hand, and this he placed in the stern of the boat, saying defiantly, "I'm comin'!—I'm comin'!"

"But you said good-bye to no one," said Helen, when Melvin Island, Greenock, Glasgow, and at last London were reached; while still the only explanation which he afforded was in the muttered words, "I'm comin'!—I'm comin'!"

"Where's the use of good-byes?" he said. "I canna abide them."

"But you are going back again," remonstrated Helen.

"Hoots, no!" said the man; and added drily, "There's many a man better appreciated when he's been a while awa."

In the train he showed the girls some valuables which he had bestowed in secret places

about his person, and gently fingering an ancient watch in a horn case which he had disinterred from the depths of his clothing, he cowered over it to protect it from even a casual gaze, as he said with a grim smile, "There's no yin 'ull see her in London."

"Are they so wicked?—would they steal things?" asked Jean.

"They'd steal the hat aff your heid," said Duncan with conviction.

Fragile-looking Agatha sat closer to her more robust sister; her tears had flowed often since the long journey began, and perhaps the nameless dangers that awaited them in distant and sinful London were more acutely felt by her than by any of them.

"I'm glad you are coming with us, Duncan," she said gently; "but you will be far away from all your friends."

"I have got twa friends left," said Duncan, with his grim smile, holding out two horny hands.

"Will you work for your living?" questioned Agatha.

"I'll no say," replied the man briefly.

He was busy counting out some change which a railway official had given him, and at present his whole attention was given to trying to prove that he had been defrauded of a half-penny

"I'll write!—I'll write!" he muttered to himself savagely, while a flush of anger rose to

his cheeks. "I'll write, and I'll no' stamp the letter!"

It was well for the four ladies that they had some one with them who was used to travelling. Madame's English was never very fluent, and she had not travelled for many years. Helen could dimly remember her journey north when she was four years old; but Agatha and Jean, sitting trembling in dark tunnels, and half sick with the roar and rush and the tearing speed of the train, were nearly exhausted when, at eight o'clock in the evening, the Northern express swept grandly into Euston station. A sort of terror settled down upon them—the crowds, the shouts, the cries were deafening, and like nothing which they had ever heard before. Madame spoke in rapid French to every one, and mingled her tears of farewell with exclamations of distress over lost luggage and the horrible atmosphere. Helen stood with her sisters clinging about her, while the warm-hearted companion of many years was put into a cab to go to her hotel, and then Duncan came and bade them follow him. To their surprise he spoke fluently to a cabman as though he knew him, and seemed on friendly terms even with the bustling porters, who looked after luggage piled high on small barrows.

"Couldn't we walk?" said Jean to him, when he spoke of taking a cab. "I feel so cramped after sitting in the train."

"Walk to Onslow Gardens from Euston at eight o'clock in the evening!" said Duncan. "God help us!"

"Duncan," said Agatha, "we are feeling dreadfully frightened."

"Is it all like this?" asked Jean, her eyes wide open as she gazed about her at the crowds.

"It is like the roar of the sea," said Helen.

"Where are they all hurrying to?" she began again presently, to which question Duncan replied, with a shake of his head, "Deed, God kens, and ye may well ask!"

The jolting cab took them slowly through the intricate streets and crowded traffic of London. To say that the travellers suffered would be only to express half their bewildered fear and apprehension. Duncan sat on the box-seat of the cab piled with luggage, and actually conversed with the strange man who drove it. He had had only one piece of advice to give his charges since the time of leaving the Highlands. "Keep a hand on yer purses, and dinna let on whaur ye're frae or whaur ye're gaein'!" The girls believed that he sat on the box-seat of their conveyance in order to direct the cabman without precisely stating the required destination. He could also be heard occasionally giving the Londoner some interesting information about the buildings which they passed, and on one occasion he laid his hands on the reins, and stopped the stiff-jointed horse trotting

painfully between the shafts, in order to descend and come to the door of the cab, where, with a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder, he vouchsafed the information to the ladies within that "yon was the shop where Jessie Maclean's sister wha marrit Robert Adam was working, and to-morrow they must see Buckingham Palace."

Lady Parfield came down to her front hall, with its pavement of shabby tiles and its marbled wall-paper, to meet her nieces, and she folded each of them in turn in a warm embrace, while her volubility entirely overcame their shyness. "Poor darlings!" she murmured from time to time—"poor darlings!" She was handsomely dressed in one of her best tight gowns, and with diamonds in her hair, and she announced that she was too sorry to be going out the first night of her nieces' arrival, but that it would give great disappointment if she absented herself from the party at which she was engaged to appear. "But you shall have a bit of supper quietly," she said, "and then go straight to bed."

The appearance of Duncan in a homespun suit of clothes, the pride of a local loom, but somewhat gaudy in pattern, came upon Lady Parfield with a shock of surprise. "Who has come with you?" she said, coming back to the drawing-room, when she had given directions about the luggage. "I met an extraordinary old man on the stairs just now, who said he had come from the North with you."

"He has been with us all our lives," faltered Jean.

"Well, he can't stay here," said Lady Parfield, almost too quickly. "My own man Waller sleeps out, and I can't think of having any one else about the place."

Fresh difficulties seemed to dog every step of their way.

"I do not think," said Agatha, "that Duncan would mind sleeping on the floor; but he has promised not to leave us."

"Oh, I'll soon settle that!" said Lady Parfield briskly, and she went to the drawing-room door and met Duncan, who was descending from an upper bedroom to which he had taken the luggage.

"The young ladies are quite safe now, thank you!" she said pleasantly. "Good evening!"

"Good-bye, mem!" said Duncan, with the respectfulness of the old retainer; "I'll gie you and the young ladies a call to-morrow."

To each day its own difficulties! Lady Parfield's present duty was to be hospitable to her nieces, and to give them supper and to see them to bed. They thought she looked very handsome with her elaborately dressed white hair, and in her grey satin gown, and her welcome to the orphan nieces was a thing which Lady Parfield did really well. She pressed comforts upon them in the shape of cutlets and soup, and, alluding to their recent loss, spoke with a good deal of feeling of her own bereave-

ments. The butler, Waller, who seemed to be on terms of intimacy with his mistress, listened to everything she said, and was even asked at times to corroborate some statement which she made. When the meal was over Lady Parfield suggested that the girls should toddle off to bed at once—and, indeed, they looked worn out with fatigue. She came to say good night to them, dressed in a handsome opera cloak, and with her fan in her hand, after they were in bed, and kissed them all affectionately. The two younger girls slept in a room on the upper floor, and there was a small room near it for Helen.

"But, my dears," said Lady Parfield, "what a lot of luggage you have brought! You surely can't have wanted anything but rags on the island!"

"Indeed," said Helen penitently, "we seem to have filled up a good deal of room." She was accustomed to wide spaces and large apartments, and she looked apologetically at the big pile of boxes and the very small amount of space that they left in the room.

"You could send a few boxes to the Pantech-nicon," said her ladyship doubtfully. "But we'll see!—we'll see!" she ended genially. "Probably you have a good many coloured things which you won't be able to look at for another three months, though a touch of lilac would be quite appropriate at the end of six months. Let me see, your father died in September; I think you ought to be at the

violet stage soon. You will find England is quite different from Scotland in the matter of mourning, and I was thinking as you came in how nice your black hats would look with white pompoms in them."

She bade them good night, kissing them again, and left the room with the rustle of her satin skirts, and as she went downstairs to her brougham she felt, as she often did, that there was not a better woman in London than Selina Parfield.

Helen came in from her own room presently, and the three girls sat together in the dark, amongst their unpacked luggage, holding each other's hands and saying very little. This was London, and the unknown world. The roar of it was terrifying, and perhaps the smell of it was worse. Everything moved so quickly! Motor omnibuses with their odour of oil roared and rattled through the streets, and men and women tried to overtake them, holding up appealing umbrellas or canes vainly to the heedless monsters. Cabmen shouted, messengers darted through the crowds on bicycles. The thick atmosphere was confusing, the noises bewildered them; but here, in the quieter portion of Onslow Gardens, where there was a *cul-de-sac*, there seemed to come a lull in the roar and the storm, and there was a feeling of thankfulness in the very fact of having reached port in safety.

In the houses near the lights began to be put

out in the windows—for it is a quiet and early neighbourhood, where people go to bed betimes ; but the street lamps were reflected in the room where the girls sat—Lady Parfield having by some magic power turned off the electric light as she bade them good-night, they had not a notion how to turn it on again.

“We have each other,” said Helen at last. It was all the comfort she could give the younger ones.

“And our aunt was very kind,” said Agatha.

“Do you think,” said Jean, “we should be allowed to open the window?” She stepped to the casement and drew down the sash, and as she did so there came a sound of music quite near at hand, echoing between the tall, solemn houses, and filling the air with its tender plaintiveness.

“It is Duncan,” said the girls, “and he is giving us the ‘Graemes’ Lament.’”

There are memories which we cling to in after years, saying thankfully, “it was not all dark then. We were not quite alone. Some one did come just when we needed him most. Even before the dawn came, a hand was laid in ours, and a voice said, ‘I am with you on the difficult road.’” In after years Helen Graeme and her sisters forgot the terrors of a first night in London, forgot the evil smells and the roar and the rush of it, and only remembered that they had gone to sleep to the sound of the pipes.

Poor Lady Parfield!

The following morning her young guests were down at six o'clock in the morning, having splashed overhead in a cold bath sometime previous to that hour. One of the ruling instincts of their lives was to be out-of-doors as soon as they were awake, and they stole downstairs now through the silent house to the hall with its shabby tiles and glazed wall-paper. The blinds were down everywhere, and a great chain held the hall door securely fastened, and, no key being visible, they turned from trying in vain three brass handles, none of which opened the door, and, finding their way to a morning-room at the back of the house, discovered that the French windows opened on to a railed space with trees in it. The railings themselves were high and spiked and were painted dull lead colour, and the two gates, which at first suggested a possible egress from the place, were securely locked.

"Are we prisoners?" said Jean, whose mind had been trained in historic lore.

"Perhaps we are shut up like ladies in the Turkish harems," said Agatha.

Helen advanced towards one of the locked gates, and, addressing the solitary passenger who walked on the pavement outside, she asked the milkman with his shining cans to be kind enough to open the door for her.

"Open the door!" said the milkman, giving the bars a shake. "Not much!" Having said

this, he uttered a strange cry, which the girls found impossible of interpretation, and descended the steps of an area.

"That was the same cry," said Agatha, "that I heard this morning when I first got up. I thought it must be some animal in distress."

"He can speak," said Helen, "although we cannot make out what he said."

"Our aunt's house seems a much larger one from outside than it seemed when we were indoors," said Jean, who had walked the whole length of the small garden which runs at the back of Nos. 81 to 91 in the Square; "but perhaps she occupies only one wing of it."

A housemaid appeared with her duster at another tall window next to the one by which they had left the house, and she flung the casement open and disappeared again.

"I think," said Agatha, "we might go inside and see if we can get some books."

The limited space of the garden had afforded but little amusement so far. The library, which they entered by a flight of iron steps, was a veritable treasure-house, containing, as it did, so many volumes which they knew that one each was not enough for them. Book after book was taken down from the shelves—the very bindings were good to touch—when the owner of the room, a tall man with grizzled hair and a slight stoop, entered and caught them red-handed. The man wore a shabby shooting-coat, and a dark neck-tie knotted

under his chin. He was frankly ugly, but his good breeding was unmistakable, and the young ladies dropped him a curtsey and wished him good morning.

It is doubtless disturbing to a householder, and more especially to one who is a book-lover, to descend to his library at seven o'clock in the morning, and to find it already occupied by three young ladies, each, moreover, holding one or more volumes of his priceless library in her hands.

"I hope, sir, we do not intrude upon your morning studies?" said Helen.

"No, no, not at all," said the man, with a humorous twinkle in his eye.

"But we like your books so much," explained Agatha; "they are nearly all old friends of ours."

"Oh, you approve of my library, do you?" said he. "Well, most people do, I fancy. Are you quite sure that you have helped yourselves to all that you want?"

"Indeed, sir," said Helen, in her old manner of the court of Versailles, "amongst such treasures it is difficult to say where our choice will end."

"Perhaps you would like some breakfast, too," said the stranger. For the life of him he couldn't decide whether some school-girls from a neighbouring seminary were playing a trick upon him, or whether this was perhaps the latest *ruse* of some clever thieves.

"We should, sir," said Jean, "if it is ready."

"I always breakfast at seven o'clock," said the man in the shabby coat. "Most people don't believe me when I tell them that I do so, but I do."

"Our aunt was out late at a party last night," volunteered Agatha; "probably she will rest this morning, and not appear?"

He was now convinced that a prank was being played upon him, and was half amused at the pretty masquerading.

"She won't be down for hours," he said pleasantly. "You will be able to have breakfast, and a walk, too, if you like, before she is stirring, I am sure."

"A walk is what we want above all things," said Jean; "but we certainly should like some breakfast first."

He led them into a dining-room lined with oak, on the same floor, and ordered a reverend-looking butler to lay three extra places.

"There is porridge!" exclaimed Jean, with a little cry of joy. "Duncan told us we should never see porridge in London."

"There is porridge and cream, too," replied their host gravely. "And, as I get it up from the country, you need not be afraid of being poisoned."

"They still poison people, do they?" said Jean, turning questioning eyes on his.

"Indeed they do!" said the man in the shabby coat, with conviction.

London was even worse than they had expected.

"However," he went on, "what you see here is all right; my cook bakes the bread, and the butter and eggs and cream come up from a place I have in Kent. Won't you begin?" he said. "I'm afraid the porridge will be getting cold."

"Will you say grace?" said Jean.

He bent his head and murmured something. With all the will in the world he could not remember the words which he used to say in the nursery, but he believed, thinking about the matter afterwards, that he had got through a verse of the Psalms fairly creditably, or it may have been a portion of the Lord's Prayer. At any rate, he knew it was a religious utterance. Agatha made coffee for him after the approved method of Madame, and the other girls talked to him about his books. He began to be bewildered, and to wonder if he was dreaming. Here were three young girls breakfasting with him, whom a few minutes ago he had found thieving in his library, and now they were discussing the Encyclopædists with him, and refuting the religious principles of Racine and Molière. With the mention of the French writers they had begun to speak in the same tongue as that in which the books were written, and the French was not such as is taught in English boarding-schools.

CHAPTER VI

"A WALK would be delightful," said Jean, when breakfast was finished, "if you are quite sure we are not breaking our trust by penetrating beyond the iron railings."

"I take my dogs for a run about this time," he said, "before there are many people about. Still"—some misgiving seizing him—"perhaps by this time you ought to be going back to your aunt?"

"I fear we should only disturb her rest," said Agatha; "and as you are a friend of hers, or one of her household, she will be pleased, I think, that you should take us out."

Now, who in the name of fortune did he know who had three beautiful nieces who talked of him as her friend, or one of her household? Were they royalties of some foreign house, escaped for a moment from the exigencies of court life, and enjoying a morning's freedom in the limited possibilities of South Kensington? If so, were the runaway princesses to be ruthlessly sent home in his carriage, or first taken for a walk? Freedom was sweet—even one morning of it—and he would take every care of them. If a raging

A.D.C. or a lady-in-waiting should overtake them, he need, after all, know nothing. Besides, who in all the *Almanac de Gotha* corresponded with these three beautiful girls who were setting out with him now for a walk in Kensington Gardens? Were they escaped nuns? Were they——? Well, they wanted a walk, and they should have it!

"We should like to see the Tower first," said Jean, as they began their walk, "and then Whitehall, if you please."

"Does the scaffold still stand?" said Agatha.

"Is there anywhere," said Helen, "where we can get above all the houses, and see things?"

"You will have to go up the Great Wheel, I am afraid," said the stranger. "You can see it from here," and he pointed to a colossal circle against the sky.

"Thank you, I think we shall go to your garden first," said Agatha.

"It isn't exactly mine," said the stranger.

They wandered along the broad paths and under the budding trees, and so right on to the Row, where some grooms exercising their horses and some early riders were to be seen.

"We find," said Helen thoughtfully, "that, in spite of its great size, London seems to be a place of limited spaces. We walked round and round the enclosed space at my aunt's house this morning until we were tired. We find here that even your horses go round and round in a circle; and you tell us that you go round and

round in a wheel, sir, when you would see London."

"You get quite accustomed to it," he said, "and you learn to like even the narrow pavements, and the tall houses that shut out the sky."

"How soon could we walk to the end of it and get out somewhere on the other side?" suggested Jean.

"We hoped," said Helen, "when we came out this morning, that we might have met a friend of ours who is in London; his name is Major Charles Hanbury, and doubtless you know him."

"By Jove! yes, I do," said the stranger. "And so you are friends of Charles Hanbury, are you?"

"He is the only friend we have got," said Helen; "we could not have come to London if it had not been for him."

The shabby man deliberately took off his hat and shoved his fingers through his hair. "Well, this beats everything!" he said.

"And now," Helen went on, "I think we must return to the house. If we are not intruding upon your privacy, we shall come to the library and read there, and you will be good enough to let us know when our aunt wants us."

"The point is," said the stranger hopelessly, "do I know your aunt?"

"I suppose, sir, as you live in her house, you do."

He was under the impression that he lived

in his own house, and he nearly said so ; but the ingenuousness of his companions forced him to conclude that there was a big mistake somewhere, and he began to be desperately afraid that he was skating upon thin ice, and feared to disillusion them. He might be a Grand Vizier in their eyes, for aught he knew, and the best thing he could think of was to take them back to the garden of the Square again.

Meanwhile, in her plush-covered drawing-room with its ebonised furniture, its few vases sparsely filled with flowers hesitatingly suggestive of spring, Lady Parfield was wringing her hands in a manner almost dramatic, while she related her troubles to Major Hanbury, who had come to make her an early call.

"They are lost, *lost*, LOST!" said Lady Parfield, "and I solemnly protest to you, Major Hanbury, that I am not to blame in the matter. Could I possibly have done more than see them with my own eyes safely in bed before I went to a party, where I know I should have been greatly missed had I not gone ? Then, another thing," she went on without pausing, "that extraordinary man-servant of theirs has been sitting in my hall since eight o'clock this morning, dressed like a mountebank, and, in spite of my own and Waller's repeated efforts to dislodge him, he will say nothing but 'I'm fine!—I'm fine!' What that means I do not know—Scottish humour is a thing I never pretended to understand—but it certainly seems to indicate that he has no inten-

tion of moving. Last night when I was at the party my servants heard the bagpipes being played outside the very doors of this house, and although we sometimes get Scotchmen coming round here of an afternoon, Waller is quite sure that the player last night was this man, Duncan, as they call him. Isn't it awful?"

"Where were your nieces last seen?" said Major Hanbury.

"I can't tell you," said Lady Parfield with almost a suggestion of snappishness in her tone. Her good humour was being sadly tried, and if Major Hanbury felt sympathetic he had an odd way of showing it. "All I can tell you is that my morning-room window was found open at seven o'clock in the morning when Maria, a most respectable woman who has been with me for years, descended to do her dusting, and that my nieces were gone."

"Had they the key of the Square garden?"

"I believe not," said Lady Parfield, and added bitterly; "but perhaps they climbed over the palings."

"We have not so much to try to discover how they left the Square," said Major Hanbury, "as how to find them."

"You must find them," said Lady Parfield, whose nerves were a little unstrung. "It is you who are responsible for bringing them here. I really beg your pardon," she said, with an attempt at a return to her jolly manner, "I am laying everything on your

shoulders in a way I ought not to do ; but you know how a woman who has been twice widowed has learned to look for male support in troubles of this kind."

"I think," said Major Hanbury, "I shall go into the garden now. Perhaps the gardener there may have tidings of the young ladies."

He was calling himself a fool because he was experiencing a sinking of the heart, which his reason told him was not justified by the temporary absence of the Miss Graemes. The three sisters were together, and had doubtless lost their way ; but they knew their own address, and could come home by cab, if, that is, it should ever remotely suggest itself to them that they were permitted to hail a passing four-wheeler. He took up his hat, and found that Lady Parfield was preparing to follow him.

"We will search the garden first," she said in a business-like way, although it is doubtful whether a cat could have concealed itself successfully amongst the bare branches of the trees or in the sooty border which ran round two sides of the Square.

In the hall sat Duncan Mackenzie, in a violent suit of Harris tweeds, with capacious pockets which hung down oddly, and suggested, what was evidently the fact, that they had been the last resting-place of slaughtered rabbits or other heavy game. His face was absolutely expressionless, and his bonnet

dangled from his horny hands. Lady Parfield passed him with almost a snort of defiance, and Major Hanbury, after one quick look at the man, said briefly, "You had better come with me."

As a matter of fact, it was Duncan who first discovered the missing ladies sitting peacefully reading in a strange gentleman's library next door.

"Yon's them!" said Duncan, in a manner quite unmoved and calm, which Lady Parfield found most irritating. He took off his soft bonnet, and, stepping over the threshold of the window without further parley, he wished his charges good morning.

"I have never heard of such a thing," Lady Parfield was saying hopelessly to Major Hanbury. "If I had been brought up on fifty islands I should have known better than to go and sit in a strange gentleman's rooms! Fortunately every one knows who Mr. Sydney Byng is, but I don't actually know him."

"I'll introduce him if I may," said Major Hanbury.

"Of course, if he is a friend of yours, that makes it a little better," said Lady Parfield, as she followed him across the lawn. "Mr. Byng is an Honourable, too," she added, "not that I think that makes any difference."

"Oh! Byng's all right," said Major Hanbury.

The young ladies were descending the iron steps of the house with that dignity which

seemed always about them, like the quaintness and the mystery of some old romance. They curtsied with deference to their aunt, and greeted Major Hanbury with frankly spoken expressions of pleasure.

"Your friend has been so good to us," said Helen cordially; while Agatha was saying to her aunt, almost in a tone of congratulation, "We have already found a friend in one of your household, without even knowing his name." Mr. Byng, meanwhile, was standing at the top of the iron steps which led to his library, thoughtfully scratching his head.

"I want to introduce you to Lady Parfield," said Major Hanbury.

"I suppose it will have to be," replied Mr. Byng with resignation, following him down the steps; "but I have avoided that woman for years."

Perhaps Lady Parfield was not averse from knowing her neighbour, even if the introduction was due to so strange an episode. He had been an object of interest to her for many years, and she had even sent in notes to him sometimes, beginning "Dear Sir," when she wanted some matter attended to within the small municipality of the Square garden; but these had obtained only brief replies, and the acquaintance had gone no further. Mr. Byng was a scholar of world-wide reputation. "And what is more," Lady Parfield had been wont ingenuously to observe, "he will succeed his

brother some day." She was voluble in her apologies to him, while inwardly she wondered how soon she would be able to ask him to luncheon.

"I feel," she said, drawing him aside quite in the manner of an old friend, "that there is so much here that wants explaining."

"Oh! not at all," said Mr. Byng cordially.

But Lady Parfield had begun her dramatic tale.

"An island in mid-Atlantic," she began, and she hastened from point to point of her story, half fearing perhaps that a man who wrote such brief notes might curtail some portion of what she had to say. "An ancient Scottish castle, and a perfect horde of retainers, and then poor Captain Graeme's death—Mr. Byng would of course remember the sad tale about him fifteen years ago—but it was no use to talk about that now. All must be forgiven and forgotten. "I always say," concluded Lady Parfield, "which of us is perfect? And life is so short.—You do agree with me, don't you?"

"So these are his daughters?" questioned Mr. Bing, "who have come to stay with you?"

"Yes, on a visit," said Lady Parfield quickly. "Nothing has been quite arranged yet about the future. Still, here they are for the present, and I'm only too thankful to be able to do something for the poor darlings."

"It is their first visit to London, I suppose?"

he said, feeling that things were beginning to be a little clearer now.

"They only arrived last night," said Lady Parfield, voluble again; "and I and my man Waller have been in consultation for nearly an hour this morning wondering what to do with their luggage! My poor brother-in-law did everything in a most princely manner, and the girls will, of course, take a little while to get accustomed to London ways." For a moment Lady Parfield, who was always inclined to be communicative, even to strangers, had half a mind to tell her neighbour, whom, as she told him, she knew so well by sight that she did not feel as if she were speaking to a stranger, the whole story of the girls' loss of fortune. But, her business-like mind in the ascendant again, the thought struck her that the next few weeks or months might show that the only possible solution of a difficult situation was for her nieces to marry as soon as possible, and by a happy inspiration she held her tongue about their loss of fortune.

The morning's *contretemps* had ended so happily that Lady Parfield's good humour was fully restored, and she administered to her charges only a half-hearted and playful scolding. They reminded her, she told them, of their poor dear uncle, who never could learn worldly wisdom, and during lunch-time she had a dozen tales to tell of him and of herself. Lady Parfield's reminiscences always bore upon them

a certain sameness of complexion, and their central point of interest could generally be found working up to some incident in connection with the title. In whatever way the story began, its end was always the same—the hall, or the church, or the theatre, were crowded to the doors—every one was being turned away, crowned heads could hardly get through the press; then at the dramatic moment, an official, generally represented as something in gold lace, was sure to appear with the words, “Lady Parfield, come this way,” and, feeling genuinely sorry for those less fortunate than herself, her ladyship would pass to some coveted front seat or crimson-lined pew. Her friends never forgot her, she used to say, and there is no doubt she had many of them, and nearly all of them had been useful to her at different times. She cast her bread—and her visiting-cards—upon the waters, and always found them again after few or many days.

“And now,” she said, when luncheon was ended, and she had genuinely interested her nieces in her stories, besides having talked herself into good humour again, “we must have our little business talk. I never put off disagreeable things, so we had better get it over at once. We” (“we” in matters of household organisation meant Waller and her ladyship) “shall have to have extra help in the house while you are here, and of course you will understand that no one can live in London for

nothing, whatever they may do in the Highlands of Scotland, so we must see what sort of an arrangement we can make with each other."

Lady Parfield treated the whole affair with her usual delicacy of touch. Her nieces had £400 a year between them. Now, for the present they would not want clothes or anything of that sort, so that if they each paid her at the rate of a hundred a year (less than two guineas a week, as Lady Parfield explained) they could manage quite well on the other hundred between them for their casual expenses, and this would at least give them time to look about them.

The Miss Graemes thanked her with every expression of gratitude, and later in the afternoon they were taken out in the carriage in order to see London, and sat in the brougham at various doors while their aunt paid calls. A few questions which they had put to her about their surroundings did not always receive illuminating answers, for, as Lady Parfield said easily, "I don't bother about such things." On the subject of books she was equally and blissfully indifferent. "I am not a scholar, and I never pretended to be one," she said, in much the same tone of voice as she might have thanked heaven that she had never tampered with black magic.

"I always used to say to your poor uncle, 'Be as scientific as you like, my dear, and I will see to the commissariat.' Believe me, my dears, there are only two rules to be observed in the

treatment of men : have dinner ready at the right moment, and sympathise whether you understand or whether you don't. That was always my system with your uncle. If he was catching butterflies, or creating the most dreadful odours in his workroom, I was always at his elbow ready with my sympathy. I never left him." It must be admitted that she had the art of ejaculating properly, and it is a great gift.

CHAPTER VII

"HERE's a chance for you!" said Lady Parfield good naturedly, entering the room next morning, an open letter in her hand. "I have just heard from Signor Bartolli—I know heaps of foreigners and people of that sort. He begs to have my drawing-room for his concert, and I intend to let him have it with all the pleasure in the world! I love doing kind things! I have decided to make it quite a musical afternoon in honour of you girls. Several singers will, I know, give me their services *en ami*; the benefit is mutual, for I suppose I am able to give more introductions than most people. Now we must see about the programmes."

Signor Bartolli was in conclave with her ladyship nearly the whole of the next day. He was a thin, nervous man, grey-haired and old, who had sung well in his time, but was now far past his work. He could still, however, with a stretch of the imagination, be called "the famous tenor," and with her gift of alchemy Lady Parfield always alluded to him as such. She would have called rabbit chicken, even had it been served with its head and ears on, and her imitation diamonds were always old paste.

She patted Signor Bartolli on the shoulder when he left her audience chamber, and told him she was going to make a success of his concert. She hoped she generally carried things through, and nobody could say her entertainments were a failure. Signor Bartolli kissed her hand with effusion, and Lady Parfield explained to her nieces that this was a foreign fashion, and meant nothing.

When the programmes came from the printers Lady Parfield was as pleasurably excited as if new photographs of herself had arrived. "A concert was being held, by kind permission of Lady Parfield, at — Onslow Gardens, at which the following *artistes* had promised to appear." Even when only a half promise had been obtained, Lady Parfield always put their names on the programmes, and she enjoyed standing up by the piano and apologising for their absence on the day of the concert as much as she enjoyed any other part of it. The tickets were half a guinea each, and five hundred programmes were to be sent out to friends and acquaintances, or to those who might possibly develop into friends and acquaintances, with a suitable legend, appeal, or word of encouragement written in ink at the top.

It was an opportunity for the Miss Graemes to show how useful they could be. Lady Parfield was punctilious and exact; a large table was cleared in the library, where the

three girls were established with inkpots and pens, and Lady Parfield, an address book and a Court Guide in her hand, directed operations.

"I shall put," she said, "'with kindest regards, Selina Parfield' at the top of those programmes which I send to people whom I know very slightly, or to whom I have been merely introduced. Helen might do all those. Then there is the charitable clique, which I shall hand over to Agatha; please write at the top, 'This is a really deserving object, and worthy of your consideration.' And to my own friends, of course, I merely put 'Do come!'—with a mark of exclamation after it—'S. P.'"

"Enclose two tickets with each programme," continued Lady Parfield. "People will never apply for tickets, but they don't like, of course, to send them back when I enclose them in the envelope. If I get many responses," she said, in joyous expectation of a squash, "I shall have red cushions on the gilt chairs."

She allotted her address-book, the Court Guide, and a Charitable Appeal list, and, with a few further directions, she left her nieces "as busy as bees," she told her various friends that day; and the work was just completed and ready for the post when she returned home at six o'clock. At that hour, Lady Parfield began to be a little dubious about who should have the "Do come!" programmes and who those "With kindest regards."

"Thinking the matter over," she said, "I am afraid there are several people on Jean's list with whom I am hardly on terms on which to say 'Do come!' You might alter this, and this, and this—the same address will do, of course. And I want all the envelopes turned in and halfpenny stamps put on them. There now," she said, when the work was at last completed, and Waller—who always felt a sense of importance when posting a large number of invitations—had taken the five hundred envelopes to the post, "that's a good day's work done!"

There was only one letter which Lady Parfield herself wrote, and it took her the whole of one morning to accomplish. At lunch-time she appeared flushed, but with decision, not to say defiance, written upon her face. "I've plumped for the Princess!" she cried; "but remember, not a word of this till we see if she comes."

The next few days were entirely given up to making lists—lists of those who had taken tickets for the concert, the number "one" or "two" being added to their names; lists of those who had declined, and still further lists of those to whom programmes might be sent.

"Of course I can only give tea to a few," said Lady Parfield; "but I shall stand at the door and receive people. A concert of this kind counts quite like an entertainment." Here again it must be urged that, with a wider margin to her income, Lady Parfield might

have been more profuse in her hospitality. Who knows?—she might even have given a considerable fee to Signor Bartolli, and there would have been tea for all who came. The purse is a restraining influence on most of us, wrestle with the fact as we like.

She was ready dressed at a quarter to three o'clock on the day of the concert, and instructed Helen to stand beside her to be introduced to every one. Jean and Agatha were to sell programmes, and their aunt hoped that they would leave off their heavy mourning for this occasion, or perhaps put pretty white muslin aprons on and mob caps; a touch of this sort always helped to make a party go well. She drew on a pair of lavender gloves, and having taken one last look at the tea in the library, she stood at the portal of her drawing-room, a smile illuminating her face, and her hair dressed for the occasion by an excellent *coiffeur*.

"Stand a little back," she said to Helen, "and come forward and shake hands as I introduce you to people. And let me give you all a hint—try and take up people's names quickly and remember faces. It's half the battle in London."

The first ring at the bell brought in two old ladies, recipients of the Charitable-list appeal. Lady Parfield had no idea who they were, but she beamed delightedly upon them, and took a welcoming step forward, gave a one-sided introduction of "My niece," and then an unintelligible murmur. Agatha showed them into

the second row of seats—the front row Lady Parfield was reserving for a few very special people—Jean sold programmes to them, and Helen found herself hoping that the names of her aunt's other guests would be more distinctly mentioned. One armchair in the front row, amply padded, and yet suggestive of state, occupied the best position of all; while next to it, in a manner quite confidential, was a smaller chair, also padded, but not so regal as the other, in which Lady Parfield would sit and converse with the Princess Maria Peterina during the privileged half-hour in which she would grace her ladyship's concert. The Princess was lame, and once, as a younger woman, she had felt an aching void in her life which could only be adequately filled by a contemplation of the wonders of nature; but nature had proved to be not in the least bit wonderful, and a further advance in her intellectual history was made when only the miracles of science could appease her. She sat at Archibald Graeme's feet during one whole winter, when he gave a series of lectures on light and sound, but even the great man of science was a little disappointing at times, and when he had said, "I don't know" to her on several occasions she ceased to believe in him, and much preferred the tremendous scientific truths which his wife was able to reveal to her. Lady Parfield courageously weighed lights, and gave measurements of waves discussed Becquerel rays, and spoke glibly of the millionth

of an atmosphere. She gave original information about the properties of radium, and had some gigantic facts about argon. The Princess always talked of her as "one of the most intellectual women she had ever met." When she wished to dispute the superiority of men in the world of science, she often said, "Look at Madame Curie and Lady Parfield and people like that," and she felt that her friend's name conclusively proved her point.

The Princess would not arrive this afternoon until five o'clock; but the red strip of carpet across the pavement, which had been laid down after lunch, proclaimed that royalty was expected; and not only did Lady Parfield's concert promise to be a great success, as her entertainments always were, but it seemed as if already she had reaped the reward of her charitable conduct.

The next arrival was a very stout lady, whom Waller led gently upstairs. He was a merciful man, and merciful to guests. No breathless caller ever gasped out her name to him outside the drawing-room door. Waller moved slowly, and Lady Parfield's elderly friends called him a capital servant. He always paused at the turn of the staircase, where there was a tiny landing, and at this point it might have been observed that each of Lady Parfield's guests, whether at the concert to-day or at her lunch parties, deliberately prepared a smile. To the silent observer (who ought never to be

at any party), the smile was as punctual and as sudden as the turning on of an electric light. The first part of the staircase was toilsome, in spite of Waller's tenderness for short breath ; but at the little turn in the staircase there was invariably a smile called up as the hostess came in view.

Lady Parfield herself put the fat lady in the front row of chairs. She sank down on two of them, and began to fan herself, and Jean said to Agatha, "Ought I to sell her two programmes?"

A fair man arrived next, and he was the one person in the whole of that goodly company that filled the drawing-room who did not smile at the turn of the staircase. He came forward dejectedly, presented six tickets at the door, and then said despondently that he hoped he hadn't done the wrong thing, but that Fanny had given him no instructions on the point.

"Your poor darling wife," said Lady Parfield, "is she really better? Neuralgia again? No, I'm only too glad to have the tickets. To tell you the truth, there'll be heaps of people standing outside in the passage, as it is, and these will give me more chairs."

"I don't mind standing out in the passage," said the newcomer, with so much alacrity in his tones that they might almost have been called hopeful.

"I won't hear of it!" said Lady Parfield pleasantly.

"Fanny thought I ought to come," said Mr. Rendell, sinking into despondency again.

"Quite right, too!" said Lady Parfield heartily. "I only wish she wasn't a sufferer, poor love! Neuralgia, too! It's such a shocking pain, so baffling, so difficult, if I may say so without being misunderstood, really to accept. She works too hard, Mr. Rendell; always engaged in good deeds—what should we do without her?"

"I suppose that is one of the salt of the earth!" said Herbert Rendell, as he seated himself in a gilt chair with red cushions beside the stout lady. "I know how good all Fanny's friends are, but she's too d——d sympathetic!"

Lady Parfield, meanwhile, was receiving fresh comers. She did such work excellently well. Even when the arrivals were so quick on the top of one another that she only had time to murmur, "Too good of you to come," and to receive their automatic reply, "Too good of you to ask me," she still kept her head well, while her genius for asking after invalids, sympathising with recent bereavements, following the exact journeys of absent relations, and congratulating on engagements was notorious, and gained friends for her everywhere.

The gilt chairs were filling rapidly, and Lady Parfield just had time, in a pause between her repeated handshakings, to whisper emphatically to Agatha, "Tell them to shove up!" Had she given directions to have her guests

ordered to leave the room, it would have been as easy a matter to poor Agatha, who grew pale at the suggestion, and merely endeavoured without any success to keep the gilt chairs in line. Signor Bartolli, meanwhile, had arrived, and a few musicians who had promised to perform. Lady Parfield introduced them to the front row, and there was a great deal of vivacious talk both there and in every other part of the room. The only real disappointment was felt when any one began to sing. When a violin was being played it was different—then etiquette merely required one to whisper ; while during a piano solo conversation might be continued without interruption ; but singing was intrusive at a party, and poor old Bartolli was quite out of fashion.

Lady Parfield kept an eye on the doorway, an ear for whispered conversation, and an ear for the tenor's song. She sat on one of the front chairs, looked attentive, and just as the last chords of an accompaniment were being played, always murmured, "Delicious!" in a tone of deep and sympathetic approval.

"Stay outside," she said to Helen ; "say 'How do you do' to people ; and keep your eye on Waller. He is going to give me a signal the instant the Princess's carriage appears round the corner."

A few minutes later Waller gave the required signal, even dashing upstairs to enforce it. Lady Parfield swept from the room, the accom-

panist at the piano became nervous and played several wrong notes, and a minute later Lady Parfield had made her curtsey, and was ushering her distinguished guest into the room. She was trembling slightly, but still outwardly composed and gracious. "I wish you had seen my curtsey," she said to Helen afterwards.

The Princess was gracious and charming; she shook hands with Signor Bartolli, and although she slept a little during the violin solo, this certainly was the fault of her comfortable armchair, and due to the fact that she had already opened two bazaars that afternoon.

When at last this most successful concert was over, and Princess Maria Peterina had driven away, and a few very particular friends had an injunction murmured in their ears, "Don't go yet—there is tea in the library," Lady Parfield was not only able to congratulate herself on its success as a social function, but she was able, after all expenses had been paid, to hand over a considerable sum to Signor Bartolli. But perhaps her warmest congratulations were kept for her nieces.

"I didn't introduce you to a bad little circle," she said, "did I? I think you will be able to tell every one you meet nice people at your aunt's house."

The girls thanked her, and congratulated her on the success of her party.

They were enjoying a long-deferred tea in the bookless library after all the guests had

left, and Lady Parfield beamed upon them, and gave them a few hints.

"You must try and smile more," she said; "perhaps at first, as you are in such deep mourning, it does not so much matter, but later on you must try and look more sunny. All girls look sunny the first year or two they come out. It is better taste, especially with older people present, and it is more natural too, and looks as if a girl was a success."

"They all asked me how I liked London," said Jean, "but none of them waited for my reply."

"Jean got on best of you all," continued Lady Parfield pleasantly, "and Sir Brook Dawson seemed charmed with her. He is married, of course, but influential. What were you chatting about, Jean?"

"We were discussing racing," said Jean. "Sir Brook is inclined to think well of the Melburn colt, but the Cowell stable always seems to be unlucky."

"My dear," protested Lady Parfield, "what can you know about such things?"

"We have not always been fortunate," said Helen; "I don't think Jean means that you should take our advice about racing matters."

Lady Parfield allowed this remark to pass unanswered, and said, "I noticed a good many photographs of horses in your bedrooms the other day, which I don't think I quite like Oh!

I don't mean to say, don't have a picture of a pet pony or anything of that sort ; but there is something about racers that always looks so fast."

"They are generally supposed to be fast," said Agatha, without intention. Lady Parfield, who was at the present moment having a second tea now that the labours of the afternoon were over, had her mouth filled with bread and butter, which prevented an immediate rejoinder, but she raised her eyes to the ceiling as a token that she was not responsible for stupidity in her nieces.

"Dear Lord Parfield," she said presently, "was one of the first peers who opposed street betting."

"Yesterday," said Helen, "we bought a paper from a man who was calling out, 'All the winners.' I hope we did not do wrong?"

"It is so quiet about here," said Lady Parfield, "that you may do almost anything ; but it is not usual to buy an evening paper in the street, except during war-time or some other time of national importance, when it would be quite permissible."

"We asked Duncan if he thought we might buy it," said Jean, in whom the perplexities of London life were creating a feeling of daily increasing bewilderment, "and we took it into the park, and read it under the trees."

"That would hardly do if you were known," said Lady Parfield dubiously. "And don't say

what Duncan says you may do," she continued, her dislike for the ancient retainer being still unabated. "It doesn't sound well, and of course I am the only person who is entitled to say what you may or what you may not do."

A means of utilising Duncan Mackenzie for the general good had been discovered by Lady Parfield, and when she had settled the matter she had a better night in consequence. Her distant "Thank you; that will do," had not always succeeded in dislodging Duncan from the hall, and Lady Parfield had not only herself, but a valuable servant like Waller to consider in the matter. During one night, however, she had arranged that the ancient and obstinate man-servant might accompany the young ladies on their walks, and this would leave her ladyship greater freedom to pursue her own avocations. "I can't take them out," she said to herself, "and I can't spare Springett to take them, either. Of course, that old mountebank cannot be seen with the girls in public; but he can, at least, take them for a turn in Kensington Gardens in the mornings." Her own time was too much taken up with engagements to allow her to see much of them; but at least they had perfect liberty, and they must learn to look after themselves. "All girls are independent nowadays," she said; "it is quite the fashion; and if you knew London better, I would not even object to your going about alone in the

mornings." Now, however, everything was settled satisfactorily, and Lady Parfield slept well, and, descending to breakfast, rang the bell for prayers. Waller placed a Prayer-book between her ladyship's knives and forks on the breakfast table, and three maids came and sat on a bench at the farther end of the room, the door by which they had entered being discreetly closed by Waller. Cook was exempt from attendance at morning prayers, for, as Lady Parfield observed with her usual common sense, "we cannot be fanatics about these things; some one must prepare breakfast." Prayers were the most rapid form of utterance that her guests had ever heard. Lady Parfield read one of the Morning Psalms as though she were rapping out some incisive orders, and she accentuated with almost biting clearness some of her petitions, in a manner which sounded as though she were afraid that her directions might be misunderstood. When she had finished she raised herself rather heavily from a kneeling position, with the assistance of the table, and filled in the pause which seemed to ensue between the contemplation of spiritual and material matters by rapping on the aneroid on the chimneypiece, and remarking upon its rise or fall.

"I think," she said, having by her meteorological observation successfully bridged over the great gulf fixed between the two worlds, "that I shall lunch out. Julia Fordyce is at

home, I know, and lunch is her best time." Lady Parfield's quotidian petition for bread often seemed to suggest to her the means of obtaining it somewhere free of charge, and she lunched at home almost as seldom as she dined there. Her good nature and pleasant frank way of announcing herself at some neighbour's house at about one-thirty was part of the very real pleasure she derived from her free bachelor life.

"I wonder," thought Jean apprehensively, "if she will give us another 'snack' if she lunches out to-day." Her vigorous young appetite had not been very plenteously satisfied the night before, when, "to save Waller," a small cold meal had succeeded the concert, and at seven o'clock this morning she had thought regretfully of Mr. Byng's porridge.

"It's window-cleaning day," said Lady Parfield, "so you girls might just pop round to Harrods' and have a bit of lunch there. It is quite a place you can go to alone, and your man-servant can take you there and bring you back."

Duncan, although utilised, was still received on sufferance by her ladyship, and when she had to address him by name, which she did as seldom as possible, she called him Macpherson, or even Macdonald, in order to show that in civilised countries all Macs were one and the same thing.

Luncheon was plentiful, and perhaps not

dear, and it was doubtless a pleasure to walk through the big shop on its soft red carpets, and to see the many things displayed there; but at the end of a few weeks, "popping round to Harrods'" was found to be expensive.

"Where do I see you marching off to?" said Mr. Byng, when he met them sitting under the trees in the garden on a spring afternoon, which, as every one had remarked many times that day, was unusually warm for the season.

"We generally lunch out when my aunt is engaged," said Agatha, in a voice that was always a little plaintive, but which to-day was also tired.

"Why do you do that?" said Mr. Byng. He had a manner which most people thought brusque, and this was not minimised by any particular geniality of expression in his face. He was a plain man with a long nose, and a brown moustache so short that it did not conceal a grimly humorous mouth and a row of even, white teeth. "When your aunt is out, you must lunch here," he said, with decision. "I cannot have you walking so far when I am next door."

A warm friendship had sprung up, over lending books and walking round the prim paths of the garden, since the morning that Sydney Byng had found his library invaded.

"We should like that so much," said Agatha, with a little sigh of pleasure, "if you do not

think it would be indiscreet to accept your invitation? We have committed so many indiscretions," she finished with a sigh, "since we came to London."

"On the contrary," said Mr. Byng, "it would be charitable. There has been a warfare going on between my cook and me for years; she has determined that I am to eat a big meal in the middle of the day, and I am determined that I shall not. In the end, my dogs—who can always be relied upon to act like gentlemen—have found a way out of the difficulty, by eating my lunch for me; they have promised not to tell the cook, and you must promise not to do so either."

"You are such children, that I don't think it matters for once in a way," said Lady Parfield, when her permission to lunch with Mr. Byng was asked; "and I can always call for you in the afternoon, which, of course, will count as chaperonage." Some misgiving assailed her for a moment, but she repudiated it aloud. "You are still in mourning," she said, "which makes such a difference! And not a soul knows you in London. Besides, as some one said to me the other day, when they were talking about you, 'Let them be ingenuous; it's ingenuousness that will make them successful if anything will.' Still, if you find no one but Mr. Byng himself there, tell him that you quite expected to meet his sister."

Mr. Byng's sister was the Duchess of Lester,

and not only was she present at lunch, but Major Hanbury was there too. There was actually a peat fire burning in the grate, and there were lilies of the valley on the table which smelt of the damp brown bed of them under the stone wall at Arvan—only those at Arvan never blossomed till June. The Duchess, who lived in Ireland nearly all the year round, loved fishing and boating just as much as her guests did. Also, she seemed to understand perfectly how puzzling things were in London, and she never repeated for the amusement of others the remarks they made, as some people seemed to do. Altogether she was a person who inspired confidence. Major Hanbury, who knew their own island as no one else did, spoke about the hills at Melvin, and of how the old garden would be looking in the early spring weather, until the western coast of Scotland seemed much more real and nearer than the environment of London. Even the roar and noise of it was forgotten as they conjured up the old remembered scenes of a misty land—the only home that Scottish people know.

After lunch, so mild was the day, they had coffee brought out to them under the trees in the Square, and though the soots were falling about them, and the uncaring cabs and omnibuses and the endless flow of strangers were passing heedlessly by, there was something friendly and homelike in the very air to-day.

The Duchess, it appeared, was Major Hanbury's oldest friend, and this quietest of men talked more to her than he ever did to any one else. Mr. Sydney Byng was as brusque to his sister as he was to every one else, and she confided to his guests that her brother had tried to make people afraid of him all his life, and had never yet succeeded; also, in strictest confidence, that he was more imposed upon than any other man in London, and that he encouraged all the most undeserving people that could be found within a radius of some miles, and that probably Sydney himself would end his days in a workhouse.

"And the worst of it is," concluded the Duchess, "he will not mind that in the least! My brother has travelled all over the world, but heaven help the person who asks him which are the most comfortable hotels! He never knows, nor can remember whether he has slept in a bed or on the floor, and his advice about some delightful journey has led his friends, who are accustomed to travelling under Cook's auspices, into countries where a slice of water-melon and some rather doubtful water are the only luxuries to be had!"

"Yet, do you know," said Agatha, who was looking paler and thinner since she had come to London, "the only time I think food tastes nice in London is in your brother's house."

"My brother is much more sceptical of the London water supply than of the wells in Turkey-in-Asia," said the Duchess, smiling; "and his servants, who have been with him for years, have, I am glad to say, a fixed idea that a literary gentleman is not able to look after himself, so they really see that he is fed regularly, and that he occasionally goes to bed. But you know that he breakfasts at seven o'clock every morning, and in London, if that fact was known, the Commissioners in Lunacy might be down on him."

"We used to get up at six o'clock," said Agatha, "but we find it interferes with the dusting."

"It wouldn't," said Mr. Byng, "if you were to come straight out of the house and take me and my dogs for a walk."

Lady Parfield now appeared at her window, and sailed up to the group under the trees, looking very resplendent in her best gown in which she had been enjoying a luncheon party. She knew the Duchess of Lester slightly, and she took one of her hands in both hers and shook it warmly, bestowing the same cordial greeting both on Major Hanbury and Mr. Byng. Another basket-chair was fetched from the house, and her ladyship spread herself out in it, and prepared to be friendly and delightful to every one. At the party which she had just attended her hostess had placed her next to Sir James Ronaldson, the balloon man,

who remembered Archibald perfectly, and discussed most interesting scientific topics the whole of lunch time; while on her other side had sat Mr. Newbolt, the journalist. Lady Parfield's friends had always a prefix or a suffix attached to them, and to these Lady Parfield herself always generously added an illuminating definite article. When giving some of the social hints with which she puzzled, not to say nearly paralysed, her nieces, she had playfully reproved them for what she admitted was a perfectly pardonable ignorance of these matters. "One does not, for instance, talk of a man *called* Mr. Sydney Byng," she explained, "but simply Mr. Byng, or *the* Mr. Byng. Every one who is any one will know who he is." She even drew a distinction between Mr. Smith and *the* Mr. Smith, and the girls were fain to admit that this distinction was always perfectly intelligible to her hearers.

"There was a perfect profusion of flowers, and the cooking was superb," Lady Parheld was saying. "I must say, money does do wonders nowadays."

Mr. Byng, who, as his sister allowed, was a person of no manners whatever, began to remind Major Hanbury in a tone of serious importance that they were both due in the City about this time, although it is doubtful if either gentleman penetrated beyond Blackfriars Bridge half a dozen times in the year. But the

Duchess having a few minutes before offered to drive them in her carriage in another direction, a slight difficulty arose, which was easily put on one side by Lady Parfield, who said it would be a sin to waste this lovely spring sunshine in the City. She became quite sportive in her repudiation of their excuses, and even laughingly reproached them in the manner of, "Oh, you men!—you men!"

Major Hanbury always became unusually silent in the presence of this popular lady, and he began to exercise his mind, as he had exercised it many times before, to discover whether or not a more suitable home than hers might be found for Captain Graeme's daughters. He was one of those men who, having fought well and lived hardly all his life, could only appreciate the essentially feminine woman. He was quite willing to admit that others of a sterner mould were equally admirable, but he had the average man's intolerance of the type of woman who is sometimes irreverently known as "an old soldier."

Lady Parfield herself was beaming with content: she waved her pocket-handkerchief to a humble friend at an upper window in the Square, and she even took the Duchess for a little turn round the garden, with ever so faint a suggestion of parading her. She then returned to the basket-chairs on the lawn. The Duchess was bidding her good-bye, and hoping politely that they might meet again; the two

gentlemen, had also risen to say good-bye; the humble friend at the upper window was watching the little party with sighs of envy; when, at this supreme moment, Mrs. Batt and Mrs. Jocelyn were announced by Waller on to the lawn.

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. BATT had been beautiful, and never forgot the fact, although now she was old and faded. She sprinkled a little eau-de-Cologne on her handkerchief on Sunday mornings, curled her hair elaborately on her forehead, and gave a penny to the crossing-sweeper when she went to church. She and her sister lived habitually in lodgings, and Mrs. Batt never failed to remark, when she had decided on a change of scene and a move to new quarters, that the landlady had seen that she was a lady directly. It was she who kept up the quiet dignity of a very humble home, while Mrs. Jocelyn did everything in the way of paying for its support. Mrs. Jocelyn was the moneyed member of a poor community. She had £300 a year, and she spent it like a princess. Also, she had a habit, which added to her air of opulence, of carrying the whole of her available cash, both in winter and summer, in a large sealskin muff-bag lined with blue silk. Mrs. Jocelyn gloried in a move, and she made fresh cretonne covers for the drawing-room every time that she changed her address. She and her sister had never very far to go. In all

their wanderings there was but one pole-star by which they set their compass. It was fixed and unalterable, and gleamed in their sometimes dusky heaven with a ray of clear light. The guiding-star, to which proud landladies were often invited to look, was nothing more nor less than the Countess. To convey the true importance of the Countess's name it would be necessary to use a larger type than common print. Mrs. Batt and her sister tried, and sometimes succeeded, in talking of the Countess quite lightly, and even familiarly. And why not? She was their own cousin. And although to the ordinary mind Lady Parfield's title, valuable as it was, was merely that of the widow of an Irish peer, still, as the sisters said, "*Lady* is a comprehensive title, and who's to know the differences?" There were many localities that otherwise might have been esteemed mean which had been irradiated by the Countess's star; and in notifying a change of address Mrs. Batt always wrote to her friends, and mentioned incidentally that the new lodgings, besides being comfortable, were "within five minutes' walk of the Countess."

The prescribed distance having been accomplished by the two sisters this afternoon, they rang at the front door bell, and were admitted by Waller.

"All well at home?" said Mrs. Jocelyn, with nervous kindness. Waller was a married

man, and slept out, and Mrs. Jocelyn, being the more courageous of the two sisters, always said something of this sort to him on entering her cousin's house, in order to get over a certain feeling of apology at having the door opened to her by the valued servant.

Waller, a man of tact, was inclined to show the ladies up to the drawing-room and warn his mistress of their arrival; but Mrs. Batt, who was pushing, signified her intention of stepping out on to the lawn. Here it was that they found Lady Parfield surrounded by her friends, and each of the newcomers in turn put up her black veil and kissed her kinswoman, at the same time addressing her in a strong Irish accent as Cousin Selina.

The sisters had found the short walk in the mild spring weather very warm, and Mrs. Jocelyn loosened her bonnet-strings and wiped a little moisture from her upper lip. Mrs. Batt looked handsome but shabby, and her cloth mantle with its bead trimmings seemed brown under the penetrating glare of the spring sunshine, and sadly frayed at the edges.

But, as Lady Parfield told herself, minimising not one whit of the awkwardness of the moment, "it was not shabbiness that counted." Many of her most important and distinguished friends were shabby, and they travelled in omnibuses and third-class carriages, and it was quite "smart" to be "not worth twopence." But there was something about these

two cousins of hers which was more than shabby, even more than genteelly poor, and their social position could best be summed up in her ladyship's own special idiom, when she said that they were "not traceable."

Lady Parfield was in many ways a clever woman, and on this occasion she was almost a great woman. Certainly her face had fallen when the names of her two cousins were announced, and there might even have been a fleeting look of reproach turned upon her valued butler; but in the end she rose to the occasion. She released the Duchess's hand, and went forward to meet her relations. She greeted them warmly, not to say vigorously, and kissed them both on each cheek, pressed their hands, and murmured, "This is delightful!"

The thing was well done; if it was a trifle overdone it must be allowed to pass, nor must the motives of one who is in extremities be too severely criticised. Lady Parfield had triumphed; she had waved her socialistic banner victoriously in a difficult situation. She had remained popular, she was still every one's friend, she had been kind to poor relations. It was Mrs. Jocelyn's own fault if she began to be more nervous than before, while she murmured to herself, "I would have given five pounds that this should not have happened, and I am a poor woman." Perhaps she felt, poor little shabby woman, that there

are certain coals of fire which burn very severely the head upon which they are heaped.

Lady Parfield excused herself for a moment in order to conduct the departing guests through the house, but she introduced the two latest arrivals to her nieces before she left them in the garden. Helen brought basket chairs for the hot and tired ladies, and the girls' very indiscriminate was like a cool and tender hand laid upon humble shoulders, which, for no adequate reason, perhaps, smarted a little.

"I wish we had not come out into the garden," said Mrs. Jocelyn, opening her heart at once with Irish frankness to her new friend. "I do think Waller might have taken us straight up to the drawing-room, or explained who was here."

"I see no reason," said Mrs. Batt, "why we should not join our cousin and her friends in the Square."

Mrs. Batt was almost as grand as Lady Parfield in her own shabby-genteel way. The two were somewhat alike in appearance, with the same elaborately dressed hair and a similar manner of walking; but while the appearance of one suggested almost conspicuously the fact that she fared sumptuously every day, the other was of that slighter build which proclaims a less generous, perhaps a less regular, diet. Mrs. Jocelyn was short and roundabout, with kindly grey eyes and red

cheeks, and she seemed never able to be still for very long at a time, but to move in an energetic manner here and there and everywhere. Her shyness this afternoon seemed to increase her restlessness, and she offered every one her chair, and even the cushion from behind her back. She clung tightly to her sealskin muff-bag, and looked as though she would have liked to bestow a little money all round, in order to atone for her presence. Mrs. Jocelyn could never get over the fact that her fortune was a considerable one, and if, as was sometimes the case, she was at her last shilling, she would in all likelihood change the coin into twelve pennies, and surveying what she called her plethoric purse, she would treat some one to a 'bus fare, or a cake at a bun-shop, with a splendour of hospitality which had something magnificent about it.

Lady Parfield remained indoors for a little while to recover herself, after seeing her friends off. The crisis was over, but she felt that she could not meet her cousins again immediately. Waller was requested to bring her a cup of tea, which he did, remarking at the same time, "I did suggest the drawing-room, my lady."

"It is all right, Waller; it doesn't matter," said her ladyship. She was beloved by all her servants.

Mrs. Jocelyn meanwhile was recovering also, and Mrs. Batt had never been perturbed. There was something a little wooden about her nature,

and she was in the enviable position of being insensible to her own mistakes.

"We've just gone into charming unfurnished apartments, with attendance," she said magnificently; "and you girls must come and see us when we have settled down."

"If the girls are like me," interposed Mrs. Jocelyn, "they will enjoy themselves far more if things are a bit topsy-turvy, and nothing tastes half so good as a scratch meal during a move. I'll toast you some crumpets on my own little gas-stove—real buttery ones, and sent up hot and hot!"

Lady Parfield, having had tea and removed her tightest gown, felt better, and came out into the garden again. She was quieter, but cordial, and gave her consent to her nieces accepting an invitation to tea in Edith Road on the following afternoon.

"Bring them yourself, Selina," said Mrs. Batt, who wanted to overawe a new landlady who was inclined to give herself airs.

Mrs. Jocelyn fidgeted uneasily with her feet; she liked coming to her cousin's house, but it was almost too much of a strain having her to tea in the lodgings. Still, she supported her sister's hospitality, and Lady Parfield, who was not quite recovered, said, "I've heaps of engagements, my dear, but I'll try and come."

There are limits to the powers even of a lady's single horse in London, and Lady Parfield's steed, which always looked tired

and unshaved, was knocked up on the following day. She had to give up all her engagements, and decided to take her nieces out to tea herself.

In the matter of paying for the hansom when they alighted on the narrow pavement of the little street, Lady Parfield's directions were cryptic.

"Try him with a shilling," she said to Helen, who had produced her slender pocket-money, on learning that her aunt was so much accustomed to her own carriage that she never carried money with her. Helen gave the required coin, and the cabman looked at it in the palm of his hand, and said, "Wot's this?"

"As far as I can understand," said Helen, in her grave way, "it is your fare."

"My fare's eighteenpence," said the man truculently. "You can take my number, if you like. I was kep' w'itin' at your door a quarter of a hour, and then you offers me a shilling! You'd better set up a blooming motor-car, that's what you'd better do. You'd find it cheaper!"

"I fear I have been misinformed about the price of hiring a cab," said Helen, handing up another shilling to the stout cabby on his very small seat. The action had something royal in it, and the cabman touched his hat. She waited until the second cab drew up in order to pay her sisters' fare, and then they rejoined Lady Parfield, who was waiting in the wax-cloth passage.

"Wouldn't he take the shilling?" she said.

"You should have come inside the house first, and then sent the servant out with the money. They hardly ever send upstairs for another sixpence."

"One would, of course, like to do justice in the matter," said Helen, as she followed her relative upstairs.

Mrs. Batt was resplendent in the drawing-room when they entered; she was dressed in her best black dress, and wore a gold locket, and she was at that moment engaged in playing patience at a small table. She rose in a majestic sort of way, and said that Nan would be here directly, and she hoped her guests would sit down and tell her all the news of the fashionable world.

Lady Parfield instantly began to retail gossip about people whom Mrs. Batt could not possibly have known, and she nodded when she did not finish a story, and looked at the young girls in a manner that was very embarrassing.

"That child's not looking well," said Mrs. Batt suddenly, pointing to Agatha.

"I think I am fairly well," said Agatha politely; "but I find that your world of London and the coal smoke makes an atmosphere in which it is a little difficult to breathe."

"She eats well enough," said Lady Parfield playfully, giving Agatha's cheek a little pinch.

Her guests felt apologetic; perhaps if one pays rather less than two guineas a week for one's board and lodging, one ought not to eat

very much. Still, they had popped round to Harrods' pretty often lately, in order to give Waller an uninterrupted day in the pantry, and that ought to count for something.

Mrs. Jocelyn here entered, bearing an immense tea-tray piled with muffins and cakes, which she set down on a table in the middle of the room. "We are still in a state of chaos," she said blithely, "and the dining-room furniture is all in the kitchen; but I've got my gas-stove in the passage, and with my gas-stove at my back I defy any one to say that I'm not comfortable!"

"You should let the maid make the toast," said Mrs. Batt superbly; "they'll only put upon you if you do everything for yourself."

"I'd rather die working than die looking on," said Mrs. Jocelyn, a happy note of satisfaction in her voice. "Clear the decks for action, that's what I always say when I want to get anything done; and don't let any one come bothering me, for it will only delay time."

"Nan is very unconventional," said Mrs. Batt, with a droop of her mouth.

"I wish we might help," said Helen; "it seems so hot for you to be doing everything." And indeed Mrs. Jocelyn's face wore a more than usually rosy tinge.

"Come along, then," she said, "and toast some more crumpets. Crisp and hot is how I like them, and enough for everybody!"

The eldest Miss Graeme followed her into the passage, where the gas-stove and some

plates were set on the top of a trunk ; while the teapot stood on a marble-topped washing-stand at the head of the stairs.

There was nothing which gave Mrs. Jocelyn so much pleasure as the sight of Taylor's removal vans at her door, or cabs with luggage-rails on the top. To live in a state of transition from one set of unfurnished apartments to another was her delight, and formed a frequent source of variety and excitement in an otherwise uneventful existence. To eat breakfast standing, and to dine at a tray placed on a chest of drawers, was a sincere pleasure to her. Her spirits rose with discomforts and inconveniences, and never to her mind did a house look more engaging than when the carpets were up and the curtains were down. She slept best on a mattress on the floor, and she enjoyed a meal cooked on a gas-stove in the passage more than any other sort of banquet.

"I am sorry," she said to Helen, her face now aflame with her exertions, "that we have got no men to meet you. But during a move I always say men are taboo. So I even dismissed Major Maskell, and sent Theodore Batt down to Margate for a couple of days. Never mind a plate for the butter ; it tastes just as well off a piece of clean paper."

She came back to the drawing-room and set chairs for every one, and Mrs. Batt and Lady Parfield made a handsome meal, while the little woman waited upon them. She had been up

since six o'clock that morning, having slept on a sofa; but while art muslin remained cheap, and cretonne could be bought at "five-three," Mrs. Jocelyn meant to enjoy a change of camp, and to have it as often as she felt inclined.

After tea she and Helen washed up the tea-things, and Mrs. Batt remarked to the landlady, who came upstairs to see if she could be of any assistance, that it wasn't every day that you had a lady from a Scottish castle helping you to dry your plates.

The landlady said, "Well, I never!" and tried to deprive Miss Graeme of her task, saying she could see in a minute that the young lady wasn't used to it.

"That means, I am afraid, that I am doing it very badly," said Helen. She had turned up the sleeves of her sombre black dress, with its ruffles of white at the wrist, and her arms were displayed to the elbow as she polished Mrs. Jocelyn's saucers with a checked glass-cloth.

"I wish," she said to the friendly little Irish woman, "that I could do things better. My aunt thinks that when summer time comes, and she goes to pay visits, I and my sisters will have to take some sort of little house of our own in the country. Our funds seem to be getting very low," finished Helen simply, "and I fear we shall not be able to pay for many servants. I wish I knew the price of anything; but I really don't."

"I have got three hundred a year," said Mrs. Jocelyn with pride, "and it does the work of ten! Theodore Batt is by way of supporting his mother, but, bless you! the whole thing comes from me, and there's always a little bit over to help Major Maskell when he is in low water."

"We have four hundred a year between us," said Helen; "but Madame de Bévallon who lived with us at home tells us that our dresses used to cost more than that. We lived quite alone, you understand; but my father used to like to see us well dressed in the evenings."

"Patronise the sales," said Mrs. Jocelyn, "you get remnants there for next to nothing; and if I can be any use to you I'll run up a blouse or anything you like on my machine."

"You are too good," said Helen, and she took the small woman's worn little hand and kissed it.

"You're my sort," said Mrs. Jocelyn warmly, "and if ever you want a friend, you remember Nan Jocelyn. I shan't fail you."

They went back into the drawing-room when the tea-things had been washed up and put away *pro tem.* in a dress cupboard, and found Mrs. Batt and Lady Parfield enjoying a gossip in a corner of the room, while the two girls looked sadly in the way.

"Should we have time for a game of cards?" said Mrs. Batt; but Lady Parfield said that she

thought they must be going. "I am dining out to-night," she said, "and I want to go round by Mrs. Wingfield's and ask if she can give me a lift in her carriage this evening. My horse is laid up—so provoking! I'm certain my man doesn't manage him properly."

At the last minute Mrs. Jocelyn conducted Helen into the kitchen to get her hat—a drooping felt hat with cavalier plumes in it, now resting upon the dresser. She shut the door for a moment in a mysterious manner, and then said, "I really mean you must come here when you like, and have a bit of supper, on Sundays, or anything. I suppose the meals in Onslow Gardens are not too plentiful? Oh, well, my dear, I don't suppose I should have said that; but I know what Selina is. She's got heaps of friends, too, and won't want you always in the drawing-room; but you can always have a cup of tea here."

Helen thanked her, and said what kind friends they had made in London. "Mr. Sydney Byng," she said, "allows us to sit in his library whenever we feel inclined, and we have lunch with him sometimes; and Major Hanbury calls and takes us out. We frequently meet these friends of ours in the Park or in Kensington Gardens."

"Well, 'pon my word, my dear, you don't do so badly!" said Mrs. Jocelyn.

"We do not, indeed," said Helen. "And although every day seems to show us how kind

people are, we think there is no one like these friends of ours."

"What a child you are!" said Mrs. Jocelyn.

"I was twenty yesterday," said Helen. "Only think how useless it is to live to be twenty without knowing how to dry plates." She gave a little sigh. "If we have a house of our own," she said, "I am afraid the servants will discover that we are very stupid."

CHAPTER IX

As the London season advanced Lady Parfield became gayer than ever; she showed a true republican spirit to all and sundry who gave dinner parties, and she obtained front places everywhere. Never had she been more popular or more engaged, and never did any one enjoy society so much. Sometimes, as she sat in the drawing-room before dinner, drawing on a pair of tight white gloves with the aid of a moistened forefinger, the memory of the evangelical Lord Parfield had to be positively intruded in order to check her too exuberant spirits. Never was a woman more successful. As the widow of Archibald Graeme she received tickets for everything that was interesting, while as Lady Parfield she was a valuable adjunct at small dinner parties, where she enjoyed the place of honour at her host's right hand. Her unimpeachable orthodoxy carried her still farther, and from Lambeth Palace garden-parties to drawing-room meetings she was in request everywhere. Her powers of assimilating and enjoying both worlds disproved every axiom that has been spoken on the subject, and her delight in entertainments set age at defiance.

As a consequence of her constant round of gaiety her three guests were a good deal left to themselves; but, as Lady Parfield justly observed, "Every woman must make her own way in the world; and it would be worse than useless for me to drag you round to places where you are not wanted."

To-day, however, she announced that she was going to five teas and receptions in the afternoon, and could take either of the two elder girls with her. "It doesn't matter a bit about going unasked to this sort of thing," she said; "indeed, what people want is a crowd."

"I am very tired," said Agatha. "May Helen go?"

"You mustn't get lackadaisical, my love," said Lady Parfield, patting her on the shoulder. She herself never seemed to feel a sensation of fatigue.

"I have sacrificed you, poor Helen!" said Agatha, when their aunt had left the room. "And the rooms and the teas will be so hot, and every one will be so pleasant! They will ask you how you liked Scotland, and whether it used not to be very dull at Arvan. And they will find out in about three minutes that we know nothing about anybody in London. I wish we were back again, Helen!—I wish we were back again!"

Agatha had been looking white and tired in the airless hot weather, and her courage was

failing; some almost bursting recollection of her old home overcame the poor child, and she flung herself sobbing upon her bed. She and her sisters had believed the world to be filled with heroic figures—King Arthurs and Davids and fair sweet Elaines, and great-souled Hector. But no one ever seemed to know or care about these godlike personages. No one ever seemed to want to hear the birds sing in the early morning, or to swim out into some cool fresh bay, or to whip the stream for trout. They never saw the sky, nor heard the shy wild animals call to each other, nor watched the sun going to rest like some grand old warrior in the red and primrose of an evening sky. They lived in rooms, and were pleasant and smiling to each other, and called every one "dear," and then hastened onwards, having learned a skilful manner of dislodging themselves from any company with a graceful, tip-toed flight and an affectionate velocity of farewell. They ate a good deal, and talked volubly, and were quick at recognising acquaintances, and bright and ready with their little bows to each other. They never forgot faces, and in one eager moment they changed from grave to gay, now asking with a sort of proficient sympathy after the health of some one in sickness or in sorrow, and the next—with a dextrous mental sleight-of-hand—congratulating some happy bride or successful author. There was much to admire in this, even as

an exhibition of well-trained memory and a technical knowledge of the world. But it was difficult to acquire, and when acquired it did not always seem very convincing. There were old friends at their aunt's luncheons who remembered their father, and who, even while they were saying, during the pause of an enjoyable lunch, "Ah! poor Captain Graeme—I remember him quite well! How sad to lose him"—had hardly alluded to the subject before, perhaps, they would find that some one at the table was telling an amusing story, and they would pause to listen to it, before continuing their condolences and their kindly allusions to the dead man.

Every one had so much to say, and there was so little time in which to say it! All talked at the same moment, and no one listened. Very few people ever finished a sentence, or were allowed to finish it. But they were always bright and pleasant, and whether it was a cold or a corpse that kept a neighbour at home, they left cards with little messages upon them, and, on the whole, it was a kindly, polite world even in its most hurried moments. It betrayed goodness at unexpected places, and with a little more time to spare it might even have been graceful.

The difficulty was to acquire its amazing cordiality and its almost glittering brightness. To a girl who had grown up amidst large silences, and whose health was failing a little

in the hot weather and the noise, the difficulty seemed great indeed, and Agatha's tears fell fast.

Helen consoled her with comforting words, slipping sometimes into the endearing speech of the Highlanders, which was in itself a consolation; and then she went to put on her heavy black dress and hat. The June day was hot and close, but, alas! the condition of the budget prohibited the purchase of muslins or lighter garments. Agatha had seen the doctor two or three times, and that was expensive, and the great man had enjoyed a chat with Lady Parfield in the drawing-room, and had said very little about Agatha, except that she seemed run down, and must take care of herself.

Worst of all, Lady Parfield, who had never seemed even mentally to add up her nieces' accounts with the same scrupulous exactness as she did her own, and who always evaded the fact that their purses might be low, had asked them lately what wages they were paying Duncan. Up till now they had never thought of the matter. How was Duncan living, and how was he supporting himself? London was very expensive, and how much longer would their faithful friend be able to stay with them? All their walks, all Jean's exercise, all Agatha's little messages depended upon the old servant and their aunt had even begun to call him playfully their "chaperon" during their walks with Major Hanbury and Mr. Byng. What if these walks should have to cease? They

determined that the only thing to be done was to ask the advice of their two friends.

Helen went to five receptions and teas in her aunt's brougham; Lady Parfield beamed kindly upon her. This really excellent woman had a sense of her own goodness which gave an added and perfectly legitimate pleasure to her life. She was feeling now that never had three houseless girls found such a home as hers, and at so cheap a rate; carriage exercise thrown in, and introductions to the best society were the benefits which she was conning over to herself as she sat beside Helen Graeme in her heavy black in the stifling interior of the brougham. "And not a thing do I get in exchange!" she concluded, with a comfortable sense of her own disinterestedness. "I am not one of those people who are obliged to take a pretty girl about in order to make their way in society; I can hold my own anywhere, and it's the women over fifty who are attractive nowadays."

"I am pretty well liked, am I not?" she said, at the conclusion of the fourth tea, as they got into the brougham again, and the head of her well-exercised horse was still turned away from home.

"Indeed, you seem to have many friends," said Helen.

Lady Parfield liked a compliment, and received more of them than falls to the lot of most women. She also gave many, somewhat

on the principle of the man who is going to speak or sing applauding the speeches or singing of those who come earlier on the programme. "You haven't told me yet how you like my new hat," she said. She considered her nieces unobservant, and far from clever; and they never seemed to have pretty, impulsive things to say to her about her hats and new cloaks, such as made girls in society so attractive.

"It seems a very beautiful hat," said Helen, who was accustomed to Madame in a neat bonnet with ribbons under her chin.

"I must dress well, you know," said Lady Parfield comfortably, "going about as much as I do. Besides, one's men-friends like it, and of course my house is a decidedly mannish one. They call it the bachelors' home, you know. I have had two husbands, my dear, and I might have had a dozen others. I understand men, and that's a thing you can't teach! Now, we'll be late here, I'm afraid; but we will just have a few strawberries and cream, and say 'How do you do,' and then I must get back early to dress for the play."

It was during dressing time that the question of Duncan and his salary was to be discussed in the Square. Major Hanbury arrived punctually at six-thirty, and went out into the garden, where Agatha and Jean were sitting with Mr. Byng. Some books were lying on a little table near them, and a faint pink colour

had come into Agatha's cheeks, usually so lamentably pale, as she discussed something they had been reading. Mr. Byng was dressed in one of his shabbiest coats, and sat in his garden chair without a hat on, his plain, clever face full of enjoyment, and the grim lines which he seemed to have purposely fixed about his mouth lost in an expression of whimsical kindly good-humour.

"Hanbury," he said, as Major Hanbury approached through the windows of the library, "I wish you wouldn't look so well and cool! We are all nearly exhausted with the heat, and I'm wearing silk shirts and trying to pretend I'm comfortable, and you appear with a high collar on and a tall hat, looking as if you hadn't walked here with the thermometer at eighty in the shade."

Major Hanbury denied that the heat was excessive, and told Mr. Byng that he believed him to be the hardiest and the most luxurious man in London.

"I wish you would grumble more, Hanbury," said Mr. Byng; "it is not only unnatural, but insensible to show so little emotion over the minor ills of life as you do."

"This is the coolest place in London," said Major Hanbury, with enjoyment. "Your sister has not yet returned, I suppose?" he said to Agatha.

"She has gone to five teas," said Jean; and Mr. Byng groaned.

"Are there no limits to a woman's endurance?" he said.

She looks very tired after them all," said Major Hanbury, as Helen appeared at the steps of the library window.

"You've been to five receptions!" said Mr. Byng severely, "and you haven't had a single decent cup of tea at any of them. Now you are going to have some here; but first of all I think the hat must come off."

Helen drew some large pins from the crown, and laid the picturesque black hat on her knee; she ruffled up her brown hair from her forehead, and looked gratefully at Mr. Byng as he went into the house to order her tea. When business was discussed, and she turned to Major Hanbury to lay the perplexities before him, there was a certain abandonment in her voice—the result of fatigue, perhaps, or a token of dependence not so much frail as admirable.

"My friend," she said, "we are in such a dreadful trouble!"

"I am very sorry to hear that," said Major Hanbury; he turned his level eyes under their sandy eyebrows on the girl beside him. "I am very sorry," he said quietly. "May I know what it is?"

"We have not thought about Duncan's wages," said Helen, "and it seems we are living upon his bounty, in so far as we take his services without any payment at all; the thing is a great

perplexity to us. Please tell us what we are to do."

"May we know exactly what the trouble is?" said Mr. Byng.

"As you know," said Helen, with the directness and ingenuousness which made a discussion upon money affairs a matter easier to discuss than Lady Parfield's ingenious arrangements. "We have each thirty-three pounds a year to spend, after the three hundred pounds has been paid to my aunt for her care of us——"

"Well, I'm blessed!" said Mr. Sydney Byng under his breath.

"This in itself we feel must be wholly insufficient to repay her," explained Agatha, "for she has told us how dear things are in London."

"She would, of course," said Mr. Byng.

"Being a kinswoman," said Helen, "induces her to behave with generosity towards us. But in the case of Duncan Mackenzie what are we to do?"

"He has paid for his own room and his food all this time," said Jean, "and he has left home and kindred and lands for our sakes."

"I will see that that is put right," said Major Hanbury. He had no idea at the moment what he was going to do. A notion crossed his brain that the rent of the island must be raised, or at least his friends must be induced to believe that it had been raised. "Please leave it altogether in my hands."

"I have been looking out for months for an extra man," said Mr. Byng glibly—the idea having suggested itself to him at that precise moment; "and he could always be next-door if you wanted him to take you out anywhere."

"In any case," said Major Hanbury, "the right thing will be done by Duncan, and you will not be deprived of him."

"We all felt when we left Arvan," said Helen simply, "that we never could have had the courage to come to London if you had not been here."

"Now, those two people," said Mr. Byng to himself, "have fallen in love with each other, and they are as little aware of it as it is possible for a man and a woman to be. I, on the other hand, am in quite a different case. I am supremely conscious of my feeling for Agatha, but I'm blessed if I know why she should care for me. I'm as ugly a fellow as they make, if looks count for anything, and I am a confirmed bachelor in every one's opinion, except perhaps my sister's. But at least I know what I'm driving at, and Hanbury, for the present, at any rate, doesn't."

Duncan Mackenzie, being summoned to a conference by the two gentlemen in the course of the next day, appeared in his usual clothes, smelling of peat and heather, and having accepted a glass of whisky and drunk it without so much as winking, he prepared to go into the

question of finance in a manner which gave no little surprise to his hearers. At first he was guarded in his statements, but his repeated assurances that he was "daein' fine" were not felt to be sufficient guarantee of his affluence. "You may have saved a considerable sum, of course," said Major Hanbury, "but it can hardly be enough to support you for the rest of your life."

"Hoots! I'll mak' dae—I'll mak' dae," said Duncan.

"I am in need of an extra man," said Mr. Byng, "and I could arrange for you to walk out with the young ladies, while at the same time I should expect you to look after my library, and various things of that sort." Mr. Byng adopted his most severe manner, and gave Mr. Mackenzie shortly to understand that he meant to prove a hard master.

"Weel, I'm no for it, and that's a fac'," said Duncan, so politely that the directness of his statement hardly sounded brusque. "I've mebbe saved more than you ken; deed aye," he said ruminatingly, and then, with a burst of candour, "there was no a horse that the Laird backed that I didna put ma money the other wye, and if folks aye had similar information on the turf, there's many would be richer than they are noo."

"It's a pity," said Mr. Byng drily, "that you were not your master's adviser."

"I was aye his adviser," said Duncan laconi-

cally, "but yon's no the same thing as being a man's guide."

Mr. Byng admitted that it was not.

"Noo, ye will wonder at what I be telling ye," continued Duncan, "but I gie the young ladies a chune on the pipes of a nicht afore I gang to ma bed, and Londoners, haein' but little chance of hearing music, show their gratitude to me in a manner which I admit is verra substantial."

Duncan's red whiskers, his striking clothes and elaborate stockings, and his freckled face were doubtless well known in the neighbourhood, and Major Hanbury was not very sure that the Miss Graemes' body-servant ought to eke out his income by playing the pipes at a street corner.

"I hae no fear of honest wark," said Duncan obstinately, "and mind ye, I'm no disgrace to the family, for I aye pu' ma bonnet doon a wee thing over ma neb afore I commence, so that nae person will ken me."

"That is no reason why you shouldn't keep my library straight," said Mr. Byng, with increasing sternness, as the corners of his mouth puckered a little.

"It's no," admitted Duncan, "but I canna say I'm partial to bukes, and I believe I hae scriptur' wi' me in the matter."

Ultimately a half-promise was obtained from him to enter Mr. Byng's services. But the London season came to an end early that year,

and at the same time there came an end to Agatha's small remnant of strength. Major Hanbury, taking authority upon himself, wrote to a London specialist to come and see her. The great man ordered her immediate departure from town, and a quiet life in the country for the summer at least; and Lady Parfield, whose plans were a little uncertain, said, in her hearty, sympathetic manner, "Take a little cottage somewhere in Kent, my dears; you will be able to live on nothing at all. I can come down and see you established before I go to Scotland, and I shall be able to introduce you to all the best people in the neighbourhood. I have friends everywhere, and of course everything depends upon having a few good introductions."

CHAPTER X

LADY PARFIELD found the cottage, or rather discovered the advertisement relating to it, and with her usual promptitude she called the next day at the house-agent's, discovered that it seemed suitable in every way, and sent Helen and Jean down to look at it.

Knowing their inexperience—not to say lamentable want of common sense—their aunt gave them full instructions before they left home in the morning.

"Be sure you ask," she said, "if the drains are in good order, if the kitchen range is all right, what the servants' bedrooms are, whether the water supply is entirely to be relied upon, and what is the nearest church."

"Shall we really," faltered Helen, "have to ask a lady all these things about her own house?"

"I will make a list for you," said Lady Parfield decisively. "It must be quite clear whether we" (Lady Parfield already associated herself with the future tenants of the cottage) "are to have the use of fruit and vegetables. The advertisement says that the gardener's wages will be paid, and my idea is that you should suggest that he should receive a hand-

some tip at the end of the summer if he supplies plenty of fruit. You might, for instance, even make a little jam while you are down there. Oh! by-the-by," she said, asking for the list back again, "inquire about baths; they are often so short in a country house."

Helen's eyes were big with dismay. "She won't think, will she, that I wish to know whether she and her household tub regularly?"

"Don't be scrupulous and absurd, my love. One might think that you were all born in the middle-ages," said Lady Parfield.

With their long and comprehensive list securely held, Helen and her youngest and more robust sister started house-hunting on the following day.

Duncan took them in an omnibus to the station, and put them into a third-class carriage. "Though it's no verra like you," he said, with a doubtful shake of his head as he gave them tickets and left them seated in the train.

They travelled almost in silence down to Kent. "Helen," said Jean at last, "give me half the list; we will tear it equally in two. I don't see why I shouldn't share."

Solemnly and honestly they divided their dreaded task, folding Lady Parfield's list and cutting it in two with a penknife. "I think you've got the worst bit," said Jean; the baths and the servants' rooms, and the water supply will all be difficult."

"But you've got to say about the jam and

tipping the gardener," said Helen ruefully. "Do you know, Jean, that several times since we came to England I have heard that Scottish people are very mean, and that they drive hard bargains. They say we are shrewder and harder than the English."

"They say many puzzling things," said Jean.

Arrived at the pretty station in Kent the sisters found that there was a four-mile walk in front of them. It was very hot in the July weather, but the country was looking radiant, and it was pleasant to walk on the turf by the road-side and to pick flowers. Jean garlanded her straw hat with them, and Helen fastened a big bunch of them in the front of her black gown. The birds were singing, the sky was blue, and the walk was thoroughly enjoyable until within half a mile or so of the house which they had come to inspect, and at the thought of what was before them their hearts sank. They turned down a narrow, leafy lane, and found themselves at the white gates of a pretty farmhouse, with a low-hanging roof and red-flagged pathway.

It was owned by a young couple who had a house in Grosvenor Street, London, but who came down to Rosemary Farm, with its half-dozen bedrooms, uneven floors, and oak-beamed ceilings to enjoy themselves. Here their little boy ran wild and grew brown and strong, and the farmhouse was a rich couple's toy. They hung it with delicate wall-papers, searched the

neighbouring cottages for tall clocks, dower chests and dressers, furnished the bedrooms with dimity, and paid fabulous prices for old brass fenders to place in the grates. The charming garden boasted a lawn, a pergola, and the usual cherished herbaceous border ; and the house, having been despised by a smart young farmer and his wife as inconvenient and old-fashioned, was eagerly sought after and bought by Captain and Mrs. Paget. (Lady Parfield opined that they must be one of *the* Pagets, and, if so, she knew them, or some of their relations, quite well.) They revelled in its low-roofed rooms and wide chimney-corners, and spoke eloquently of the charms of the simple life, and the possibility of living on next to nothing at all. And this they did without any sense of irony, hardly realising, indeed, that their builder's bill for one year would have kept any poor family, who were obliged to lead the simple life, in unusual comfort for the same length of time, and that a couple of gardeners' wages is not always included in the expenditure of those who live on next to nothing at all.

The Pagets were obliged to leave home in August and September in order to take a cure at some foreign spa, and they determined to let their dolls'-house in the country at some nominal rent to careful tenants, in order to have their old oak and brass, their dimity curtains, and the garden properly taken care of in their absence.

It was part of their economy to bring no men-servants to the country with them, and a neat, smiling village maid opened the door to the timid knock on a very ornate brass knocker, which had been sounded by the elder Miss Graeme.

"Is Mrs. Paget at home?" she asked, and the servant threw open the door and bade them enter. She had no need to ask their names, for the two girls found themselves at once in a tiny, picturesque little hall, where a lady was sitting. She rose as they entered, and, shaking them both by the hand in a cordial manner, she bade them welcome, and asked them to sit down.

"But you surely never walked from the station?" she said; "why, it must be four miles at least! And this grilling hot day, too! You didn't say your train, or of course I should have sent to meet you."

Such graciousness and courtesy were very refreshing, and presently Captain Paget came in, and he was equally cordial. Mrs. Paget introduced him as "Dick," and he too sat down and began to chat, and to be pleasant to the new arrivals.

"There are one or two people coming to lunch, I am sorry to say, but I hope you won't mind." Mrs. Paget at the same moment rang the bell, and instructed her maid to set extra places, and indeed the kindness and good-will of the young couple whose servants' bedrooms

they had come to inspect, and whose tubs they were going to number, made their inquisitors feel doubly shy of their errand.

"If it is quite convenient to you," said Helen, when the weather, the garden, and similar topics had been discussed, "will you allow us to see the house?"

"Indeed I will," said Mrs. Paget. "It is a dear little place, isn't it? But we must have lunch first."

Two or three new-comers arrived at the same instant, and everything was a bustle of welcome; the gong was sounding, and they went into the low, wide dining-room—"the former kitchen of the house," as Dick Paget explained with pride—and began to enjoy a menu such as is not always included in the strict régime of the simple life. Unfortunately, the luncheon took a considerable time to consume, and Duncan was to meet the Miss Graemes on their return journey at Charing Cross at half-past five; that meant catching the half-past four train, and they must therefore not leave these delightful people in their pretty house much later than three o'clock. How little time it left them to ask questions! They would return to Onslow Gardens having made no inquiries at all, and then what would Lady Parfield say! Helen fingered her list nervously. She was seated next Mrs. Paget, who was looking at her with frank admiration; while Dick, at the other end of the table, was making himself agreeable to

Jean and his other guests. It certainly was sometimes an advantage to know so many people as Lady Parfield did ; she had probably been right in supposing that the young people were *the* Pagets, and Helen began to think that she must have written to them to say that her nieces were coming. Lady Parfield was always generous, both with her notes and her introductions.

"Won't you drink claret or anything?" said Mrs. Paget.

Helen declined, and said that she would have some water. "Will you excuse my asking," she said, "if the water supply is good?"

"Excellent, I think," said Mrs. Paget.

Helen gave one glance at the crumpled list in her lap. "Would you," she faltered, "have any objection to my having it analysed?"

Mrs. Paget looked astonished, and then laughed. "I am afraid you can't have it done now," she said; "but won't you have some claret, if you are afraid of it?"

Jean, meanwhile, at the other end of the table, had given one look at the clock, and she, like her sister, feeling a panic stealing over her at the advancing hour and the utter absence of any business done, was heard asking with much directness and simplicity, during a pause in the conversation, "Are your servants comfortably housed?"

Dick Paget said he hoped so, and they would jolly soon let him know if they were not; and

Jean, determined to finish her uncongenial task and get it over, inquired categorically if there were tubs in all the bedrooms, whether there was a doctor within call, and whether the Pagets had a pew in church.

Having said all this, she squeezed up her aunt's list with a sigh of relief, and put it back into her pocket.

Dick said he hoped, by Jove! there were enough tubs for every one; as for himself, there was a big bath upstairs which he always used; there was a pew in church—the Missus always went, but he himself thought that Sunday was a day of rest, besides, he did not care for the parson at Tongham. He paused, with a smile on his face, and Mrs. Paget said, in a tone of distress, "I hope nobody has been telling you that they are not comfortable here? I mean, you know," she said, laughing—"I believe if there is a scarcity of water in the morning, the mistress of the house gets all there is, and her guests don't like to say anything about it. Although the house looks so simple," she said apologetically, "we really have made it very comfortable, both inside and outside."

Luncheon being ended, she suggested that they might go and have coffee in the garden, and that afterwards the girls should walk round it and see what a sweet little place it was.

This was Helen's opportunity. With a supreme effort she pulled herself together, and said, "If we were to come and stay here,

might we have some of the fruit to make into jam ? ”

“ Oh, er—I’m sure my wife would be delighted,” said Dick. “ I am quite certain that half the fruit in the garden gets rotten just because the cook is too lazy to preserve it. Are you so fond of jam ? ” he finished off, with a queer smile upon his face.

Helen glanced at the very last item on her list, and said, “ If we were given plenty of vegetables for dinner, we would tip the gardener well.” She then folded up her piece of note-paper, and felt that their troubles were over.

Captain Paget looked perplexed. The tipping of servants, is not, as a rule, discussed between a guest and a host ; and he said, “ Please ask for anything you want. I shouldn’t like my men to take tips from any one who stayed here.”

Jean, meanwhile, was saying to Mrs. Paget, “ Have you got a good kitchen range ? ”

“ It is a new one,” said Mrs. Paget. “ I don’t know if a cook ever thinks a kitchen range quite right.”

They had wandered back towards the rose pergola and the lawn, and drank coffee in the shade of a big mulberry-tree, and the air was so soft and fresh and their new friends so pleasant and the garden so charming, that it was with a sigh of regret that the girls rose to go. Captain and Mrs. Paget protested against their early departure, and said that next time they came they hoped they would come to stay.

"You are so good!" said Helen, "and if you really will have us, we will come for two months."

In the pause that followed this remark, she wondered with a dim feeling of apprehension what mistake she had made. Perhaps the "arrangement" should have been led up to in a manner more subtle; perhaps they ought to have skirted round the question in the way Lady Parfield did; perhaps she ought to have written. It was impossible that the Pagets did not altogether approve of them, or they might not think them desirable tenants. How could she have landed them in such an awkward predicament!

"Well, just at present," said Mrs. Paget, at last, with rather an awkward little laugh, "we think of going away ourselves."

"Of course!—of course!" said Helen quickly and politely. "That is why we want to come. You have mistaken me, I feel sure. We wouldn't dream of coming while you are here yourselves; but we quite thought you were leaving for two months."

"But, my dears," faltered Mrs. Paget.

The situation was only saved by the smiling maid-servant appearing on the scene with a telegram on a silver salver. Dick opened it, and without a moment's hesitation read out: "The Piggots can't come!" He then dropped the telegram on the grass.

Mrs. Paget almost lost colour for a moment. "Then who——" she began.

"Well, anyway," said Dick, looking at the two girls sitting with such grace and ease in basket-chairs on his own modest lawn. "Anyway," he said loyally, and before his wife could speak, "we are very glad to have seen you."

"Though, who——" began Mrs. Paget again—"of course we have loved seeing you," she amended, catching her husband's eye; "but if you wouldn't mind telling us your name?"

"I am Helen Graeme," said Helen, "and my sister is Jean; Agatha is not very strong, and couldn't come."

"I am sorry Agatha couldn't come," said Dick, with his odd smile.

"And I think," said Helen, rising to say good-bye, "the only thing I still have to ask is, 'are the drains all right?'"

Accustomed as she was to the strange behaviour of English people, Helen could not understand the action of the otherwise courteous Captain Paget, who lay back in a deck-chair laughing, and quite unable for a few moments to speak gravely.

"Yes," he said, at last, "the drains are all right, and there are tubs in every room—and, my dearest," he said to his wife, taking her by the elbow and giving it a little shake, "they are tenants, and they have come to see the house!"

"We are too sorry if we have intruded," said Helen, the colour mantling her cheek, "and,

indeed, I fear we have done our business awkwardly! We have bothered you with a great many questions, and—and"—she finished—"we haven't even seen the servants' bedrooms yet, or the kitchen range, as we were told to do."

"By Gad, you shall see them both! And I hope you will be our tenants," said Dick cordially; while Mrs. Paget, only anxious to atone for her own stupidity, and to put the girls at their ease again, was telling them that two unknown young ladies, the Miss Piggots by name, were engaged to come over sometime to-day to see them. They were daughters of a very old friend, and though they had often corresponded, they had never met. "And, of course—of course, I thought you were them," she finished ungrammatically, "or that they were you—how does one say it?"

Dick was still smiling, and told Jean that she should have all the fruit in the garden to make jam. The afternoon finished in friendship and laughter. Perhaps—who knows?—a few questions from Mrs. Paget may have elicited the fact that a high rent could not possibly be paid for the house. In any case, the terms were easily arranged between them. Dick, having displayed the kitchen range, insisted upon driving the girls back to the station himself, and wished them good luck and a happy summer. And ten days later Duncan Mackenzie came down with the luggage, the Miss Graemes themselves arrived the following day, and Lady Parfield

promised that as soon as she had fulfilled a few more engagements in London she would come down and settle them in, and see them made comfortable before she went to Scotland.

It is not too much to say that the first few days at Rosemary Farm were the happiest that the girls had spent since their father's death. The first night of their arrival was a time long to be remembered. When they arrived at the station the smell of the pure country air, full of a hundred scents, the songs of birds, the common wayside flowers, filled them with a sense of joy such as they had not tasted for many a long day. In the house they wandered from one pretty little room to another, admiring the wall-papers and the old-fashioned furniture; then walked on the flagged pathway in the little garden, picked great bunches of flowers, and sat first in one corner of the garden, then in another, to enjoy every possible sensation of which they were capable.

"If we lived here always we should not long for Arvan every day, as we have done," said Jean.

"If we only had the hills," said Agatha, "we should be too happy."

Lady Parfield arrived the following week, and was charmed with everything. "You have quite a little bower here," she said. "And I like the address, too. There is something simple and unaffected about Rosemary Farm, which quite suggests the rôle of châtelaine on a modest

scale. So many small houses are called villa or *maisonnette*, and you could hardly have got any one to alter the name, as you have only taken the house for the summer months." She had brought Springett with her, but she solemnly protested that she must pay board-wages for that excellent female, a suggestion that her nieces put on one side with an air that recalled poor Captain Graeme's lordly attitude towards money.

"You are our guest," said Helen superbly, yet with the simplicity which made her always appear so childlike, "and whatever our poor house affords is yours."

Lady Parfield was fain to admit, after a few days' residence, that the house did not offer very much, and she then and there made up her mind that the simple life would never suit her. Still, a month in Kent exactly fitted in with her plans, and seemed to be especially arranged by that kind Providence who directly controlled her little country visits. She was always grateful for hospitality, and never appeared at greater advantage than when she was at some one else's table. An opportunity for economising was apt to produce a warm glow of honest pleasure in her breast, and there was no doubt, as she herself often said, that she "shone as a guest."

There was a little pony-carriage in the village, in which she paid many calls on the best county people, and invitations began to

arrive for garden parties and other rural entertainments. Under Lady Parfield's auspices the card-tray in the hall filled rapidly.

"You wouldn't know a soul if it wasn't for me," she said one day, frankly but pleasantly, as she set off for a garden party. The world of rural England became as much like London as she could make it. She seldom walked off the high road, and not often on that and her invitations to dine out became numerous.

To the outside world she explained everything to the best of her ability. She explained why the girls had so few servants, explained why they had not more silver on the table, and why they kept nothing in the way of a carriage; explained how well-born they were, and with what prospects they had been brought up. Her conversation to neighbours consisted almost entirely of an authorised version of the Graeme family history.

Duncan alone was not quite in favour yet. "His manner is so strange," she used to say, "and I dislike his way of saying 'whit' when he does not hear what is said to him. He really mustn't play the pipes down here, or people will think you all quite mad." But that was almost the only stipulation that she made.

In glorious August weather, when the poppies blazed amongst the ripe corn in the fields about the house, and even the shady

lawn beneath the Spanish chestnuts began to look burnt up with the heat, Major Hanbury and Mr. Byng came down to the village inn near by, and Lady Parfield congratulated her nieces again that they had her for a chaperon. She began to forget how young they were, and to say that there was a necessity for her presence—at least, while her Scottish visits remained uncertain.

Major Hanbury, being so old for his years, could be trusted anywhere; but Mr. Byng was a *parti*, and, this being the case, the girls ought to be tenderly shepherded while he was there. A man with his prospects must have it gently but plainly conveyed to him that the daughters of the late Captain Graeme were people of value upon whom every consideration was bestowed, lest any aspirant to their hand might commit the fatal mistake of believing that they were unimportant or undesired. She was gracious to both gentlemen when they appeared at tea-time on the lawn of the house during the first day of their stay at the inn. There were moments, she admitted to herself, when she did not quite understand Major Hanbury; but his fame as a soldier more than outbalanced a certain suspicion that he was not as cordial as she would like him to be. Towards Sydney Byng she showed unqualified approval; as a follower of science he could appreciate her love for brainy people, and in talking to him she even sometimes betrayed a

detached feeling towards the rest of the world, whom she alluded to as "people who could take no interest in anything serious." Mr. Byng heard from her for the first time some of her most gorgeous scientific facts, and he listened to all with his twisted smile and look of humour, while he watched Agatha in her muslin dress lying in the shade of the trees, and thought how valueless books were to teach one any of the things that were useful in life, and wished to goodness all the volumes he had ever read could give him the power of making a girl care for him. He sat by her chair and read to her in the afternoon, while the other members of the party played croquet on the lawn.

It was believed by both the gentlemen that it was a happy dispensation of Providence that Lady Parfield was afraid of the night air. Consequently, when they came into the garden after dinner, her chaperoning duties were conducted from within the drawing-room. Helen had an old Spanish guitar, hung with a broad blue ribbon round her neck; and, sitting on one of the little circle of chairs underneath the trees, she would sing old songs that tell tales of lost battles, and of men who fell upon the heather unconquered and uncomplaining. Through all the songs a certain noble strain seemed to run. Men died marching, and women loved to the very end, and home and country were the most beautiful things in life. Evening

after evening they sat thus on the shady lawn while the country was still and hushed about them. And at ten o'clock Lady Parfield always tapped on the drawing-room window for propriety's sake, and said, "Come in, come in, my loves; I had no idea it was so late."

But to-morrow would be as long and sunny as to-day. To-morrow Sydney would bring his books as usual to Agatha's couch, and watch the colour come and go in her cheeks; and to-morrow Charles Hanbury would stroll in the fields which he loved, with the girl who never chatted nor made conversation for him, but who knew all about the things he cared for. To-morrow he would even play croquet with Lady Parfield in the blazing sun, because of tea-time which followed after it. Jean had begun to tie her flies again, and Duncan had unpacked the spinning-wheel.

Dear Lady Parfield thought it all rather affected and dull, and felt glad that her visits were shaping themselves for September. But she had really been of use during the last six weeks: she had also renewed acquaintance with many old friends in the country, had got a host of letters written, and had overlooked pleasantly and indulgently even those little things which were not entirely to her mind. Still, she had reigned supreme in Onslow Gardens, and had had her own friends about her, and she often said, with a good deal of sentiment, as she

thought of her luncheon parties and her bright fires and her plush-covered drawing-room, that she did miss her home. An atmosphere that had something idyllic and pastoral about it did not altogether suit her, and with all their courtesy there were moments when she suspected that her nieces regarded her as an elderly person. This was a foolish attitude of mind, and Lady Parfield told Springett, not for the first time by any means, as she was dressing her for dinner, that her hair might be grey (Heaven knew she never dyed it!), but that she could marry again to-morrow if she chose.

Major Hanbury and Mr. Byng walked over from the inn after dinner, and took their accustomed places in the circle of basket-chairs under the mulberry-tree. The week in Kent was nearly over, and it was their last evening in the garden of the cottage. The Miss Graemes were already seated on the lawn, and it seemed to their two friends who joined them that their welcome always had in it something too kindly and sincere for effusiveness. The mechanical "There you are!" or playful "What an age you've been!" were lacking in the dignified simple greetings. Lady Parfield, however, supplied the necessary ejaculations, and was sympathetic, chatty, and affable. She told all her interesting tales, and only when the dew began to fall heavily did she rise to go indoors, saying, "Well, you dear people may like rheumatism, but I don't; however, I can hear all

you say, and will join in the conversation when I feel inclined." Having said this, she nodded in a bright way, and, sinking into an armchair, went to sleep over the pages of a scientific magazine.

A harvest moon climbed up the sky and hung over the thatched roof of the house, looking boldly through the red chimneys. The drowsy flowers in the herbaceous border had all gone to sleep, and the rustic aisles of the pergola, with their clinging burden of roses, made a sharp-cut, dusky pattern on the dewy lawn. The trees were enamelled in black on a sky of blue and silver, and the shadow of the mulberry-tree was cavernous and deep. This was a night on which the fairies might dance in circles under the moon, and little Pucks should mount and ride the antlered deer in the neighbouring park. It was a night not of earth at all; the magic and mystery belonged to some other sphere altogether.

The flowers in the borders had all been dipped in silver, and the fantastic shadows on the lawn shortened as the moon rose. The ruddy light from the drawing-room windows glowed upon the flagged pathway with its border of box, while nearer at hand was the cavernous shade of the whispering mulberry-tree. The air was full of scents and a midnight glamour of sound. All the fairies were out, and love was abroad, and Sydney Byng said to himself, "Even Charles understands now, and of course I understood long ago."

The practical question which was the outcome of Mr. Byng's visit to Kent was formulated in his mind into a very simple statement : he had fallen in love, and he wondered how soon he might ask the lady to marry him. With consternation he heard from Major Hanbury that Helen had written to him to say that her sister seemed less well, and asked him to send a doctor from London to consult about her. Her complete ignorance of the cost of things made it easy for him to do this without imposing any large expense upon them, and the great physician, having gone in his motor-car to Kent and discussed Agatha's case, decided without any manner of doubt that it would be impossible for her to winter in England. Mr. Byng thereupon promptly decided that there was only one possible way of taking her to the Riviera and having her under his own care, and that was to be married in October, if Agatha would consent. But his plans were frustrated in the most unexpected and painful manner through hearing by telegram that his sister had had a serious accident in Ireland, and he was summoned to go to her at once. This was the end of September, and before October was over, and while he was still in Ireland, he heard from Major Hanbury that Agatha and Jean were to go to Biarritz together, and that they were to be away for the whole of the winter.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN the last evening at the cottage arrived, it was a matter of no small thankfulness to the Miss Graemes that they passed it alone. The tie of kindred, so strongly felt in the North, was in itself sufficient to prevent any criticism of their guest, and Lady Parfield had been most amiable during her visit; now her Scottish plans had at last arranged themselves, and her nieces had bidden her good-bye with a sort of solemn thankfulness, feeling that in view of the events immediately before them some kindly and merciful fate had decreed that they should be alone.

To-night they sat round the fire in the pleasant, homely little hall in the house, for the evenings were getting chilly, saying very little to each other, but with hearts which ached almost uncontrollably in thinking of to-morrow. They might be wanderers, they were doubtless exiles, but it had never occurred to them that they might be separated from each other; when that became clear, it seemed as though life could contain no sorer trouble for them.

Duncan announced his intention of going with the travellers to Biarritz, and he had only

one important question to put before he said good-bye.

"Would you," he said, "just tell me as briefly as possible, Miss Helen, what yon bothering French words is for 'I'm thirsty'?"

"As briefly as possible," replied Helen, "the French would be 'J'ai soif.'"

"It doesn't sound very like the thing," said Duncan doubtfully, "it's mair like the sort of name you'd ca' an eediot; but I'll try it—I'll try it," he added more hopefully. "And I'll mind the bairns," he said; "dinna ye fash yer heid."

The sisters said good-bye to each other; and it was only after they had gone that Mr. Byng was able to cross over from Ireland, and went to see his friend Major Hanbury, who told him all that had occurred during his absence.

Agatha was not seriously ill, and her constitution was sound; but a cough which she had contracted would probably end in lung trouble unless she spent the winter in the south. It had been a time of great trouble and anxiety to the girls, and the eldest Miss Graeme, so Charles Hanbury said, had behaved with her usual courage in the matter. A winter at Biarritz for two girls, with medical attendance perhaps, could not be arranged even in a small way without absorbing the whole of their available income. The journey, even, was a consideration, and Agatha must have every attention

when she got there. Major Hanbury was looking worried and anxious as he told the story.

"Their aunt," he said, "is going to Egypt for the winter."

"I conclude," said Sydney, who occasionally spoke disagreeable things, "at some one else's expense?"

"I believe," said Major Hanbury, "that she has got an invitation from the Spenders to go up the Nile in their dahabeah."

"And she," amended Mr. Byng, "will give a few valuable introductions in exchange."

"She has let the house in Onslow Gardens," said Major Hanbury.

"Then what in the name of fortune is Helen going to do?" said Sydney.

"She has decided," Charles said, "to endeavour to support herself at home." Major Hanbury spoke more shortly than usual, and his eyebrows were drawn down over his eyes.

"That's impossible, you know," said Mr. Byng shortly. "My sister has had a horrid smash-up, and will have to be in a rest-home the greater part of the winter; but some other plan must be arranged for Miss Graeme."

"I assure you, Sydney," said Major Hanbury, "I've thought of every single plan possible and impossible, but at present nothing suggests itself to me. The Miss Graemes know nothing of the value of money, but they do know what

their income is, and it would be impossible to make them believe it is bigger than it is."

"You say Duncan has gone with the girls," said Mr. Byng. "I hope he will look after them properly."

"I think they will be all right," said Major Hanbury, more easily than he had yet spoken. "I was really thinking of Helen."

"Yes, no doubt you were," said Mr. Byng to himself.

"I shall be going out to Biarritz myself this winter," he said aloud; and he said it so defiantly and so severely, that Major Hanbury replied quite meekly, "Oh, will you, Byng?"

"Yes," said Sydney Byng, "I'm going to play golf; I forget if I told you before that I was going."

"If you have, I had forgotten it," said Major Hanbury. Then he continued: "You see, Byng, it isn't as if I could be quite certain of being in England this winter. There seems every chance that I shall be sent in command of this expedition to Tälung."

"In the meantime," said Mr. Byng, "where is she staying?"

"She has gone to Mrs. Jocelyn," said Major Hanbury. "That excellent little woman at once sent a most cordial invitation to Miss Graeme to stay with her as long as she liked, and until her plans were settled."

"Well, that's better," said Mr. Byng more cheerfully. Mr. Byng lived habitually in a

world of books, and therefore could not be supposed to understand the needs and necessities of young womanhood. This was a powerful excuse for him in the eyes of Major Hanbury, who replied, with perfect good temper, that he didn't think Byng seemed to understand the difficulties of the case.

"I know Mrs. Jocelyn is a good little soul," said Sydney.

"One of the kindest women in the world," said Major Hanbury warmly; "but as poor as it is possible to be, I should say, and Miss Graeme will only stay with her until she can find something to do. Her idea seems to be to look after children, or to act as companion to girls. But whatever she does, it will be in some subordinate position, and I don't think she is fitted for it," finished Major Hanbury.

"Best of men," soliloquised Mr. Byng, "crusader, knight-errant, anything you like! Does it never occur to you that you are not only one of the best fellows God ever made, but that you have gained a position for yourself which almost any woman would be proud to share?"

"My dear Charles," he said aloud, "it often occurs to me to wonder if you were snubbed in your youth?"

"I believe I was," said Major Hanbury simply. "My aunt, who brought me up, seemed to think it was good for me."

"A man who has been snubbed in his youth,"

said Mr. Byng solemnly, "will probably have one great danger to guard against through life, and that is humility. Remember what I have said, Charles," concluded Mr. Byng, laying his hand on his shoulder.

"I haven't the remotest notion what you mean, Sydney," said Charles.

Helen, meanwhile, had bidden her sisters good-bye. They did not weep as they stood at Victoria station, but they remained quite close to each other, glancing from time to time at the clock, and counting the last minutes that they had together. When all the seats were taken, and the train was out of sight, she turned away silently, and was driven in a humble cab to the small house in West Kensington which was to shelter her till she could find a means of maintaining herself.

The insignificant street wore a tired look, like the face of some one who has been in town all the long summer days. Over nearly every humble door the legend "Apartments" was writ large in black letters on white pasteboard; or a house agent's notice on a board was planted like a stiff little flag in the front garden. The particular house at which her cab drew up was occupied at the present time by Major Maskell, Mrs. Jocelyn, her sister, and her sister's son. The house was so small and so insignificant that it was difficult to realise with what pride it had been acquired; but it was the first

time that the little party had been tenants of an entire building, with a maid of their own, and the experiment, while it left them breathless over columns of figures, to see if it would work out as cheaply as lodgings, at the same time produced a very distinct flutter of pride in the hearts of the incoming tenants.

The house, as has been said, was not large. The back drawing-room formed a bedroom which was occupied by Mrs. Jocelyn, while the best room overhead, which boasted a marble washstand and mahogany bedstead, was the abode of the elegant Mrs. Batt. There was also a sofa of patent construction in the drawing-room which could be made into a bed for Mr. Theodore Batt whenever he should happen to be at home. Mr. Theodore Batt was an author, and it was part of his character and profession to be uncertain in his movements, and unpunctual in his appointments. To add to his artistic appearance, Mr. Batt was in the habit of wearing a soft felt hat turned up at one side, and his neckties were generally of some violent colour and strange device. He was often absorbed in thought for hours together, without, however, putting his ideas on paper, and his was one of those roving, untrammelled natures which enjoy carrying their luggage in a pillow-slip, and sleeping in a bathing-machine when funds are low.

Major Maskell paid for his lodgings when he could afford to do so; and even when he did

not pay he owed like a gentleman. He would infinitely have preferred, as he told his successive landladies, to be a "regular paymaster" always; but there were calls on Major Maskell's purse which he found irresistible, and if those calls made a heavy drain on his finances they might also be said to make a serious inroad on his constitution. To put the matter with as much delicacy as possible, Major Maskell was not a teetotaller. He enjoyed a glass of wine—enjoyed it, it may be said, at almost any hour of the day or night, and he blamed the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the undue incursions that this made into his income. Everything was unfairly taxed, he thought—most of all, alcoholic beverages.

When Major Maskell's financial position became acute Mrs. Jocelyn could always be relied upon to help him, and he thought it very much to her credit that she had never to be asked for assistance. Bless you, she knew when funds were low as well as any one! She had been through a lot of that sort of thing herself until that blackguard Jocelyn died, and left her his small fortune. There was some tie of kindred between them—a cousinship, or common Irish ancestor; but a stronger tie by far consisted in the fact that, in Mrs. Jocelyn's own particular way of expressing it, "they had all been old campaigners together." A distant colony, when it was under English governorship, had been the home of the three, and the

scene of their raciest experiences. The two sisters had grown up under the shadow of the barracks, and had esteemed it their greatest good fortune when a jolly regiment was quartered there. They had flirted and danced with half the subalterns and captains in the Army, and had been engaged to one man at least in every regiment that had been quartered in the place. In the end, the elder sister had married the chaplain of the 140th Regiment, who was a good man, but consumptive, and he died a couple of years later, leaving his wife penniless, with a boy to look after. The following year, her sister—pretty, racy, badly brought-up Irish Nancy, with a waist that could be spanned by the finger-tips, and with blue eyes and a tilted, impertinent nose—married Captain Jocelyn, who threw ponderous objects at her when he was out of temper, and seldom addressed a civil word to her when he was urbane.

“Thank God,” as Mrs. Jocelyn often said, “both of them are in their graves now!”

Major Maskell had been in the same regiment as the late lamented Jocelyn, and he had borrowed his money when he could, and had been sympathetic and helpful to his wife, even when Jocelyn had turned crusty and refused to let him have another farthing. And now that her husband was dead Mrs. Jocelyn felt that she owed an enormous debt of gratitude to Major Maskell for the kind words which he had been

wont to speak to her. When her more astute sister, Mrs. Batt, would sometimes point out that perhaps the Major had had the forethought to refund himself by liberally acquiring Captain Jocelyn's money when he was alive, Nancy always said, with a good deal of feeling, that kindness counted for far more than money when you were in trouble.

Major Maskell accepted Mrs. Jocelyn's help, and received her gratitude very prettily. He was one of those men who will find some woman to befriend him and to take care of him into whatever part of the world his feeble steps may lead him. In the first place he was very good-looking, and he had good manners, and was gentle even when he was most irresponsible. Every one found an excuse for the Major: his wife's death had been a sad blow to him; he had had a slight sunstroke in India; it took much less to upset him than it took to upset other men—and he was nearly always sorry afterwards in a gentlemanly, weak way.

Mrs. Jocelyn went joyously into the new house on the strength of Helen's visit, and got through the move within two days in a sort of fierce excitement and delight.

Mrs. Batt, who lived exclusively on her sister's income, found Finborough Road expensive. By always wailing of expense Mrs. Batt thought she materially assisted the fortunes of the family.

"If it is too costly, we can move again,"

said Mrs. Jocelyn, with an eager look forward to the time when it might be a positive duty to shift camp once more. "I've got seven-pound-ten to my credit, which ought to do the move and leave me something over for cretonne and things, and we can carry little odds and ends round on trays ourselves after dark, if we don't happen to have a surplus for cabs."

The rapidity with which a move was conducted did her credit: a house might appear to be in a state of chaos unimagined by the mind of man before, but cosmos was evolved in a startlingly short space of time, and Mrs. Jocelyn might be found sitting in state, in a sitting-room gay with new covers, and talking of "establishing routine" in incredibly quick time. She equalled her sister in dignity for the following few days, and dressed for dinner in the evenings; but if nothing else could be found to disturb this irksome and dull state of magnificence, Mrs. Jocelyn would dismiss Annie, the servant, at a moment's notice, and, congratulating herself that she had got the back premises cleared of an incubus, she would set to work with a will.

Whenever the art muslin wore out Mrs. Jocelyn found in the fact an excuse for moving onwards, and Mrs. Batt always asked for the discarded draperies, if her sister had no further use for them. Mrs. Batt thought—and frequently said—that she could not bear to see things wasted. What was not given to Mrs.

Batt constituted in her mind that sort of waste which she particularly disapproved. It is hardly saying too much to record of this lady that she made the delicate task of bestowing gifts easy, by suggesting the appropriateness of certain articles to her own use, and she often begged people not to throw away things, which they did not at the moment think of discarding, on the plea that she might be able to adapt them to something. In this way Mrs. Batt collected various and curious personal properties about her, and these Theodore could always be relied upon to convert into available cash when a pinch came. Long habit had made him an acute bargainer.

On the night when Helen arrived the house was at its zenith of excellence. Art muslin and cretonne reigned triumphant in the drawing-room, and Major Maskell being in low water at present, Mrs. Jocelyn had contrived that he should have a fire every day by suggesting that his sitting-room might be made the general dining-room for a time. In this way, too, Major Maskell might be prevailed upon to share the meals which were provided. "I'm sure what you eat needn't count between us," Mrs. Jocelyn said; but the Major, protesting gently, begged that he might be allowed to settle up afterwards. Mrs. Batt told Helen privately that Major Maskell was a great expense, and "too fond of hanging on."

Mrs. Batt at her best always alluded to herself

as the widow of a clergyman, and this, besides being true, was often helpful. Even in their most strenuous days, when Theodore's stories were being regularly returned to him by indiscriminating publishers, and the difficulty of supporting four grown-up people on £300 a year was acutely felt, she always curled her grey hair elaborately, and wore a gold locket.

Miss Graeme was not accustomed to find, when supper-time arrived, a lady waiting at table who wore a red satin evening bodice, originally cut low, and now filled in and lengthened in the sleeves with Turkey-red twill; nor had she ever seen soup helped with a tea-cup before. She accepted all things as so much fresh knowledge, and she made large allowances for differences of nationality.

The small sitting-room where they dined was Major Maskell's, and was furnished with half a dozen chairs covered in American cloth. A cheap print hung over the fireplace, and there was a sideboard on which books, pipes, and wine-glasses were laid indiscriminately.

The fare was abundant, and Mrs. Jocelyn not only piled Helen's plate so generously that she was embarrassed by having to leave so much uneaten, but she further showed her sympathy by telling her guest, when she came in from a walk in the afternoon, not to bother to change her dress before supper. Mrs. Batt plied her with questions about her sisters, her aunt,

and her home, and she alluded to the journey to Biarritz as being fraught with many dangers.

"You are all much too pretty to travel alone," said Mrs. Batt. The door opened at that moment to admit Mr. Theodore Batt, and his mother cried out delightedly, as she saw the colour deepen in Helen's cheek, "That blush was just in time to captivate Theo!" Mr. Batt was, in point of fact, captivated directly, and frequently said so in the days that followed. Never had he seen so much beauty or so much grace! "A regal loveliness," he said to himself, and captured the phrase at once by scribbling it in his pocket-book, adding: "*Mem.*—Lord's daughter, from the land of mist and heather; make die young or marry a duke."

"Theo is always late," said Mrs. Batt proudly; "his thoughts are in the clouds."

Mrs. Jocelyn popped up from the table herself to help him to chicken, and drew beer for him from a stone jar placed underneath the sideboard. "If you want a thing well done, do it yourself," she said, when Mrs. Batt, whose soul soared to elegance, suggested ringing for the maid.

Theodore sat with his elbows on the table, staring at Helen; and Mrs. Batt said, "He will be putting you into a novel, and making you famous, some day, my dear."

The author ran his fingers through his hair, and made frequent jottings in his note-book, and

put on a yearning look. His mother and her sister gloried in a love affair, and were slightly disappointed because Helen did not seem more responsive. That all girls like all young men was an axiom with them; and every man was a "chance," more or less.

Mrs. Jocelyn kissed Helen and sent her to bed as soon as she declined pudding, for no particular reason except that she had an instinct that an absence of formality made every one comfortable, and that to get up in the middle of a meal and go to bed must make Helen feel at home.

"Don't bother to unpack to-night," she called after her as she went upstairs. "I'll lend you a hair-brush and things."

Helen sought her bedroom, which was highly decorated and not quite clean. Her trunk was still in the linoleum-covered passage downstairs, but the maid in the red satin bodice promised to bring it up in the morning, with the assistance of the milkman. "George is always so obliging," said the maid in a friendly manner.

"A young girl is always something of a restraint," said Mrs. Batt, as soon as the door closed upon Helen. Mrs. Batt had enjoyed the extra good fare provided for this evening, but she was afraid Helen was a little bit too stately for so young a girl. "At my age," she said, "of course it is different."

"She will be the guardian angel of the house," said Theodore. "Her unconscious grace is like

that of some dethroned empress." (Mr. Batt again sought his pocket-book.)

"Poor orphan girl!" said Mrs. Jocelyn, with feeling. And Mrs. Batt remarked, "She will have a dozen offers before the year is out."

In the narrow circle in which they moved, and surrounded by friends who were mostly poor and nearly all out at elbows, a certain freemasonry existed. Even the most slender meal was often shared with chance comers, and the elemental things of life—births, deaths, and marriages, together with frequent love affairs—were of inexhaustible interest in their lives. An offer of marriage, it was ingenuously admitted, was the highest triumph of womanhood; it was always discussed as if it were a matter of public property. The fact that many of the ladies in the little circle of friends had married conspicuously unhappily was no argument in disfavour of the holy estate. In the eyes of the sisters and of their friends an unmarried woman was a poor thing, for whom there was but one consoling thought, and that was that "she might manage it yet."

"I've got it!" exclaimed Theodore, who had been sitting on the dining-room sofa chewing a pencil with his brows bent for some time. He rose suddenly from his seat in the way in which he loved to startle his friends, and continued excitedly, "I'll make her ride a steeplechase. I see the whole thing before me. Just imagine that glorious figure on a horse!

Give me pen and paper, mother, and don't sit up for me."

"What a thing it is to have a genius for a son!" smirked Mrs. Batt.

"You shan't go to bed hungry," added her sister, who did not believe in her nephew's genius, but whose kindness of heart generally showed itself in a very practical way by making offers of food. "Some cold chicken you shall have; and if you just tap at my door five minutes before you go to bed I'll make you a glass of sherry negus, which will send you off like a top."

The Major, who had not spoken throughout dinner, was reminded of a duty which he owed to himself, and he poured out a glass of deep-coloured sherry with a trembling hand, and drank to every one's good health.

"Poor fellow!" said Mrs. Jocelyn excusingly, with a glance at Mrs. Batt, who was beginning to look contemptuous, "he's a little bit upset to-night."

"You encourage him, Nan!" said Mrs. Batt.

Theodore, having ruffled up his hair into a high crest over his forehead, sat like a man in a trance for some minutes, and then wrote feverishly far into the night at a shaky writing-table.

"No 'Nap' to-night," said Mrs. Batt, in a voice in which pride and disappointment mingled. "Let's hope that poor child plays cards."

CHAPTER XII

THE next morning Helen was hardly awake before Mrs. Jocelyn appeared by her bedside, clad in a crimson dressing-gown, and with a cup of tea and a plate of buttered toast in her hand. She kissed her guest warmly, set the tray upon her feet, and told her not to bother to get up for breakfast.

"I am really not tired," said Helen, who was unaccustomed to breakfast in bed.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Jocelyn easily, "the fact is, none of us are great breakfast eaters, so we generally just have a cup of tea like this, and let the maid work about in the mornings; but we will have a bit of lunch about twelve o'clock, or any time we feel inclined for it. This is Liberty Hall."

Mrs. Jocelyn then sat down on the edge of the bed, and said with surprising suddenness, "I feel convinced that Theodore Batt is going mad."

The unexpected confidence was startling, and Helen could only say sympathetically that she hoped that poor Mr. Batt would not become violent.

"I must tell you how queer he was last

night," said Mrs. Jocelyn, in a mysterious whisper ; and taking the precaution of opening the door first to see if any one was listening, she went on, " He was chewing his pencil, and muttering in such a very odd manner. Now, if he were a genius, of course one could understand his going on like that, but as a matter of fact there is nothing to excuse such eccentricity. Do tell me," Mrs. Jocelyn, "how he struck you."

"I think perhaps Mr. Batt might be called a little excitable," said Helen, with a certain gravity of truthfulness which characterised her.

"Hush!" exclaimed Mrs. Jocelyn, "his mother is always creeping about, and she mustn't ever hear a word we are saying!"

The weather was very foggy, and hung like a grey blanket over everything outside. Two candles flared on the dressing-table, and by their light Helen proceeded to eat her breakfast. She had often heard of people having very vivid evil dreams, and she wondered if they could be at all like this. The fog outside seemed to her like some unearthly pall covering everything ; no flight of her imagination could ever have pictured such a thing had she not seen it. In the darkness she heard the rattle of cabs, and the more distant roar of the traffic in the street beyond. The cemetery which she had seen from her window yesterday afternoon was obliterated altogether by fog. By the flames of the two candles she saw the

figure of Mrs. Jocelyn seated at the foot of her bed, with a pillow interposed between her and the iron rails, and heard her discuss lugubrious subjects with vivid interest, not to say cheerfulness.

"His father," the little woman was saying, "died of galloping consumption, and, as you are of course aware, the two diseases are nearly allied."

"Ah, that is dreadfully sad!" said Helen, her heart going out in pity towards the irresponsible young man.

"It was you who set him off last night," said Mrs. Jocelyn, smiling in a congratulatory manner, and giving Helen's toes through the bed-clothes a sly little pinch.

"I thought he wanted to do some writing," said Helen, a tone of deepest regret in her voice.

"Get along with you, you pretty child!" said Mrs. Jocelyn, "and don't despise a conquest, whoever the man may be."

"I should be very sorry to upset Mr. Batt," said Helen, "especially as he seems so excitable."

"You are a good little soul!" exclaimed Mrs. Jocelyn genuinely, "and I'm sure one needn't be surprised at any one falling in love with you!"

A suitable reply to this remark being difficult, Helen remained silent and finished drinking her tea, and Mrs. Jocelyn continued, "You

can't begin too soon—not that I should recommend Theo to any one, except the most hopeless—but I always say to girls, 'Keep your hand in.' Why, bless your dear heart, I had a dozen offers before I was twenty-one, and then I got the wrong man after all!"

Certainly it was difficult to find a reply to Mrs. Jocelyn's confidences. Helen hoped she did not appear unsympathetic by remaining silent.

"And now, my dear," said Mrs. Jocelyn, kissing her affectionately, and having thoroughly roused Helen both with tea and talk, "you turn round and have another little nap, and I'll bring you a little egg-flip when I send some up to poor Major Maskell at eleven o'clock."

"I hope Major Maskell is not ill?" questioned Helen.

"Not a bit of it," said Mrs. Jocelyn, "but you know what men are in the morning."

Having uttered this enigmatical saying Mrs. Jocelyn departed, but she popped in her head two minutes later to say that George having a bad heart, she could not allow him to carry up that great heavy box, so would Helen just hand over her boots, and she—Mrs. Jocelyn—would give them a rub up, "and later," she said, "we will all turn to and carry your things upstairs ourselves."

"How is she?" said the plaintive voice of Mrs. Batt at the door.

"As right as a trivet!" replied her sister.
"Come in!"

There were now two dressing-gowned figures sitting heavily upon her feet.

"I think," said Mrs. Jocelyn hospitably, "that we shall be able to make her as happy here as she was at Lina's."

"She means Lady Parfield's," said Mrs. Batt.

"I'm sure," said Mrs. Jocelyn, "she is Lina to us! We can't talk of our own cousin as Lady Parfield."

"I always say Selina is a sweet woman," said Mrs. Batt, "and being so much the same height, she often gives me one of her dresses."

"She always takes the trimming off first," said Mrs. Jocelyn. "Heaven forgive me! And before the child, too! I'm a regular pepper-pot, my dear, and what's inside comes out with a jerk, sometimes, and it's often more stinging than I intend it to be."

"Nan is very impulsive," said Mrs. Batt, drawing down her upper lip.

"Well, now," said Mrs. Jocelyn, whose directions varied every five minutes, "you'd better get up, and I'll tell Annie to bring you some hot water."

"Maud, you mean," said Mrs. Batt; her conversation was generally punctuated by small corrections of this sort.

"They are all Annie to me," said Mrs. Jocelyn, with an air of large-mindedness. And, indeed, it was a useful view to take of the matter, in

consideration of the fact that whereas lodgings were changed two or three times a year, the change of the servant in the lodgings was a still more frequent matter. Annie was the generic name bestowed on each successive maiden, who, having been received as a "treasure," was evicted as a "trial" at the end of a few months or weeks of service.

It was during the interim between the successive Annies that Mrs. Jocelyn not only proved herself a trump, but was probably at her happiest. With the aid of a faithful charwoman, who was sent home laden with food for her piteous family each night, Mrs. Jocelyn did the entire work of the house, and as Mrs. Batt never moved a finger on these occasions, she could be referred to as "one of the most helpless women that ever lived," which added greatly to the enjoyment of the little woman. It was her pride that everything should be at its best when there was no maid, and she worked early and late, her good humour increasing with every chair that she dusted, or plate that she washed. Only Major Maskell and Mrs. Batt must be helpless! The situation would have lost its charm had they exerted themselves at what Mrs. Jocelyn called a "crisis."

The lady of the scarlet bodice, which had been removed in favour of a wrapper of doubtful cleanliness, met Mrs. Jocelyn outside Helen's door, and said that the Major's bell

had rung, and should she take up his tea and hot water, or should she first brush Miss Graeme's boots?

"Take up the tray," said Mrs. Jocelyn, "and here, give me the boots."

She rubbed the boots briskly with a glass-cloth, remarking, as she did so, "Any port in a storm!" although, as the blacking brushes were within reach, the necessity for finding a port in a glass-cloth was not too obvious.

"Make the coffee strong, my child," she called out to Abigail in the pantry; "and do try to persuade him to take it without cognac. Poor fellow! I daresay he does feel a bit low nowadays without his wife. Just let it be a dash, then; and say the cellarette is locked up if he asks for any more. I thank God that made me a woman and not a man! They are so odd in their ways."

Mr. Theodore Batt had not been able to sleep, for which perhaps he was not altogether to blame, for the convertible sofa had various excrescences on its cretonne surface which grew larger as the night wore on, and Mr. Batt had risen early, and had gone for a solitary ramble before breakfast. He came back looking gaunt and unshaven, and thinner than ever—the precarious meals of the lodgings had not served to fatten Theodore. He announced that he had breakfasted at a coffee-stall, and said that that was the way to see life. And he proceeded to lie down on the dining-room sofa,

where he slept for the greater part of the day. Mrs. Batt had dressed meanwhile, and was now sitting in the drawing-room, in black cashmere and gold locket and chain, busily engaged in playing patience.

"I played cards," said Mrs. Batt, "before I could read or write ; there's not much else to do here, and it will keep you out of Nan's way when she is busy. Sit down, and I'll teach you."

Helen's trunk being still downstairs in the passage, she could not plead books or other occupations, and she and Mrs. Batt played "The Demon" and "Miss Milligan" till a quarter-past twelve, when Mrs. Jocelyn appeared at the door, looking very hot, and announced that lunch was ready, and that she was going to send the Major up a little bit to his room. She had not only cooked the entire repast, but she had found time to sally forth in an omnibus and purchase the materials for it ; and she helped every one with generous hands, drew the cork of Theodore's stout for him, and jumped up to get the bottle of claret which she had put on the mantelpiece for Mrs. Batt. After lunch Mrs. Batt went back to her patience, and Theodore suggested taking Helen for a walk.

He put on a soft felt hat, pinned up on one side with a claw pin ; and, the fog having now lifted, he took her for a turn in Brompton Cemetery to see some memorial wreaths which

he assured her were very handsome, and must have cost a fortune. He seemed to deal in large figures, and to have intimate knowledge of many things in connection with what he called "private information such as never gets into the newspapers."

"I've almost decided," he said, to his companion, in the course of the walk, "to go into Parliament. I have not yet made up my mind what constituency I am going in for, but literature and politics are often combined nowadays, and I believe I have an immense future before me."

Helen wished him every success, with that simplicity and sovereign courtesy which made even Mr. Batt lower his high figures sometimes.

"Yes," he said, "it's brains that are going to make the world go round at last. The day of vested interest is over, the proud landowner is a thing of the past, and wealth itself is coming to do homage to intellect."

Once more Mr. Batt drew his note-book from his pocket.

"What you say makes me feel rather sad," said Helen. "Mrs. Jocelyn may have told you, perhaps, that I look forward to supporting myself for the next eight or nine months; but any knowledge which I may possess seems to be of the most useless description, and of no commercial value whatever."

"Typewrite," said Mr. Batt briefly. "I have

got a Remington machine, bought second-hand from a fellow I used to help with his stories; but he has gone into a brewery since, and I'll give you lessons on it any day you like. What I say is, one must keep pace with the times. Typewriting is the force of the future in so far as clear writing is involved. Ladies of fashion are beginning to want secretaries every day, and with your elegant appearance you would sail in."

Helen thanked him warmly for his offer to teach her a useful craft, and Mr. Batt said in his excitable way, as he clapped his hands, "No time like the present! Buy an evening paper—see if any one wants a secretary; if not, advertise in the *Times* or the *Morning Post*. Let the paper be a Conservative one; we may say what we like about the advance of Liberalism, but the upper classes are still at heart Conservative, and it is in the upper classes that your chance will lie."

His words seemed full of wisdom and hope, and they bought an evening paper, and read it in the gas-lit drawing-room in Finborough Road. No secretaries were advertised for; but Mr. Batt continued reading the paper aloud, and this performance was always full of interest to his hearers. Evening and morning papers alike—even the *Daily Mail*—were but stale reading in the mouth of any one else after listening to Mr. Batt's statistics and his items of startling intelligence. He despised

small figures; a unit was almost unknown to him, and his active mind multiplied everything by tens. In this way he was usually able to give very sensational information. Items of news about things in general seemed always to be seen by him through a magnifying-glass of extraordinary power. He hardly ever failed to add an extra nought to the figures which he saw recorded, or to double the circumference or height of any object that was mentioned. In this way his world was peopled with objects of enormous size.

To-night, in the sitting-room, he stood up under the gas-burners, and, gathering the attention of the room by an impressive look from his eyes, he remarked, "That scaffolding of the new City Alliance Building has fallen at last!"

"Good gracious!" said Mrs. Batt, prepared to enjoy to the full the horrors which might be in store. "No one killed, I hope?" She leaned forward in her chair, and put out her hand as though warding off a blow.

"Forty bodies recovered up to the time of going to press," said Mr. Batt defiantly. "I have the details here, if you would like to hear them."

A workman had fallen from the scaffolding of the new building in the afternoon, and had, alas! been killed. The evening press had multiplied the accident by four, and Mr. Batt light-heartedly added a nought and made it

forty. Newspapers seldom came to Mrs. Jocelyn's lodgings, and the whole current intelligence of the day was supplied by Theodore, whose fantastic habit of thought and histrionic powers gave a vividness and interest to the most ordinary affairs.

"Ah, their poor mothers!" said Mrs. Batt; "I know what they must be feeling!" Motherhood was the one vocation in which no one could deny Mrs. Batt had excelled her more brilliant younger sister, and it may be said that this plea for superiority was frequently referred to by her. Indeed, there were times when it might almost have been supposed that Mrs. Jocelyn, being without children, could not possibly understand a single emotion of the human heart.

"Their wives, too, I'm sure," said Mrs. Jocelyn quickly. "I suppose many of the poor fellows were married."

"Married, and with large families, I should say," said Mr. Batt, relishing this extra touch to the tragedy.

"Still, no one can tell what a mother feels," said Mrs. Batt, and she looked at Theodore, and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I prophesied the fall of that scaffolding weeks ago," he said; "I wrote to the County Council about it. I know some of them quite well, so I have some influence in that quarter. I wrote to the *Sun* also, but owing to some mistake my letter never was inserted. I don't

as a rule touch journalism, unless it's something political; it gives one no scope for style."

Mrs. Batt glanced at Helen to see how she received this impressive statement.

"I'll have to be working up my constituency soon," the young man went on. "I have private intelligence that the General Election will take place before Christmas."

"Have you been down at the House to-day?" questioned Mrs. Batt. She was anxious to bring forth his best for the benefit of their distinguished guest, and she asked the question in a tone in which she might have said, "Have you been at Buckingham Palace?"

"I have looked in now and then when I could spare time from my committees," said Theodore.

"We move in quite a political circle, you see," said Mrs. Batt to Helen.

"I have drawn up my list of what I think the Cabinet is going to be," went on Mr. Batt, producing a pocket-book. His pockets were usually stuffed with heterogeneous articles, and this gave his coats the appearance of being stretched unpleasantly tightly across him. He proceeded to read out a list of names, and his mother continued to glance from time to time at Helen to see how she was affected by the prescience and intimate knowledge of her son.

Mrs. Jocelyn always said frankly that she did not understand politics, and thought them

great rubbish. She left the room, and descended to the lower regions of the house to prepare a little supper. To her credit be it said that no one was ever hungry who entered her humble door. She now appeared labouring under a tray with glasses and sandwiches upon it, and she glanced severely at Mrs. Batt as she set it down. Later that evening she came again to sit upon Helen's feet when she was in bed, and told her in confidence that Mrs. Batt would not move a finger to help her if the house was on fire, and they were all burning in their beds.

Mr. Theodore Batt, who, for an unknown reason, had been pacing the shaky floor of the dining-room for some time and ruffling up his hair, was recalled to a contemplation of mundane matters by the appearance of the tray, and he handed round the plate of sandwiches, and then placed it abstractedly within his own reach. Major Maskell accepted a modicum of whisky, and Mrs. Batt, drawing down her upper lip, told her sister that she hoped it had been docked off his little allowance downstairs.

"You are too good, Nancy," said the Major, as he helped himself out of the common little decanter.

"To-morrow," said Theodore, "the type-writing lessons begin. A lady's hand can look as elegant upon the keyboard of a Remington as upon the notes of an organ. Ten o'clock to-morrow, in the dining-room," he said, making a note of the fact in his pocket-book, and pre-

paring to leave the company on the plea that he had burning thoughts within him, and meant to sit up and write all night.

"Well," said Mrs. Batt, as the door closed upon him, "I haven't seen Theo so much taken up with any one for a long time." Her face was radiant with approval, and she looked in a congratulatory way at the girl seated on the cheap little sofa by the fire. The sitting-room looked like some common frame set round a picture of great beauty. The tawdry yellow wall-paper of the room, the shabby furniture, even the accompaniments of the humble supper on the black tray, had a look as of things heterogeneous and *bizarre* when seen as a background to Helen.

"She is just as bad as I was as a girl," said Mrs. Batt quizzingly, "and I believe I was every bit as haughty."

"Be off to bed, you young puss," said Mrs. Jocelyn, giving her a warm and loving kiss, "and don't trouble to get up in the morning."

The following day was devoted almost entirely to learning the use of the typewriting machine. Helen was even permitted to descend at ten o'clock in the morning in order to commence her studies, and as she had by this time carried up most of the contents of her trunk in relays to her bedroom, the consumptive George, with the assistance of Maud, was now able to remove it from the passage. All the morning she sat and tapped at the circular

white keys of the Remington, while Mr. Batt sat beside her and told her vigorous untruths about the construction of the machine, its cost, and the number of patents which protected it. Later, he read some of his stories to her, and explained all that they were meant to mean, besides what appeared to the casual reader.

"I write for posterity," he said; from which remark perhaps it would be cruel to infer that the present generation were not wholly his admirers. "I write for posterity," he used often to say to himself when the dull dawn found him still covering sheets of foolscap in a chilly room. Posterity was such a large-hearted, loyal friend, so kind also! He always wrote far into the night, having an idea that unrecognised genius was wont to do so. It was a great comfort to him in those days to remember how some of our greatest poets and writers have often starved. He walked round St. James' Square the whole of one night, because Johnson had done so. This walk Theodore determined to have recorded in his memoirs, and for that purpose he wrote an account of it in his journal, and entered his exact sensations during his midnight rambles before he flung himself on the patent sofa, and slept wearily until late in the afternoon. On the rare occasions when he was asked out to dinner or supper he invariably made a practice of consulting his engagement-book first, to see whether it was possible to

accept, and he frequently remained away from his aunt's lodgings and had no dinner at all in order that he might say he had been dining out. This manner of passing the evenings, and its consequent asceticism in diet, caused Mr. Batt to decline in health; he was very thin, but he admired his lantern jaws in the looking-glass in the morning, whilst regretting an inward sinking which accompanied this fineness of profile.

Helen inquired with interest whether Mr. Batt had been bringing out anything new lately.

Theodore smiled. "I have been bringing out of the storehouse of my mind," he said, "but the world has not yet seen what I have written."

She was half afraid to ask to see the unpublished manuscript, but Theodore did not hesitate for a moment to produce it from his coat-tail pocket. Most people believed that he habitually carried a manuscript in this particular pocket, and that there was a certain element of danger in mentioning literature to him for this very reason. There were even men who would have seen a fellow-creature's hand steal towards a revolver pocket with less apprehension than they saw Theodore's motion towards his coat tails.

He cleared his throat. "I write very little, as you know," he said, unfolding the paper and flattening it out; "but the wear and tear of nerve-

tissue involved in the writing of even these few lines cost me two nights of exhaustion ere they were produced."

"I should like so much to hear them," said Helen.

Theodore began to read slowly and expressively. "I aim at style before all things," he said, and settled his queer-coloured tie about his neck and crossed his legs. He felt that it was a disgrace to his artistic nature to wear trousers, but he had not yet decided what other garment to adopt in their place.

"I wish I could write!" said Helen. A letter had come from Biarritz that morning; her sisters had arrived, but the expenses of the journey had been heavier than any of them had anticipated. It seemed more than ever necessary that she should discover some means of obtaining a livelihood, and, if possible, of forwarding some money to them.

"Don't attempt it," said Mr. Batt apprehensively; "there are far too many of us in the business already."

After a substantial tea-dinner, which was served by Mrs. Jocelyn *vice* the regnant Annie, incapacitated by toothache and a swelled face, Mrs. Batt said in a somewhat captious voice that she did hope they would have their little game of cards as usual to-night.

It seemed to be an accepted fact that Mrs. Jocelyn should "put up something" to be played for at these games. The prize usually

consisted of a shilling or sixpence, and the keenness which was evinced by Mr. Batt, his mother, and the Major to make the coin their own made them lend an absorbed interest to the game. Mrs. Batt not infrequently stated what she should buy if she should be the lucky winner, and she had a playful way of pretending to appropriate her neighbours' counters in a manner which never failed to inspire them with alarm. Theodore seldom more completely came out of his moods of abstraction and his brown studies than when there lay before him the possibility of making money. When Mrs. Jocelyn won, there was a deep silence among the little group of card players, until she had offered, with a watery smile, to stake the prize again, when cards were quickly shuffled, and the game once more absorbed every faculty of the players. Helen, with the proverbial luck of the novice, was the winner on the first night, and Mrs. Jocelyn looked pleased, and pressed the shilling which constituted the prize into her hand with an affectionate air of congratulation.

"Lucky at cards, unlucky in love," said Mrs. Batt, a little sharply.

But Helen, already embarrassed by the possession of the much-coveted coin, became genuinely distressed, and would doubtless have begged Mrs. Batt and the others to compete for the prize again; but Mrs. Jocelyn evidently foresaw that her embarrassment might have

some such result, and, noticing the acute expression of regret in her sister's eye, she popped the shilling into Helen's hand, swept the cards on the table together in a vigorous way, and proposed that Mrs. Batt should get on with "Wheatsheaf," as it was late.

Helen still felt deep regret for the disappointment which she had caused, and it was a relief to her when Major Maskell borrowed the shilling from her the next day to buy stamps—a form of expenditure for which he frequently required small change, although it did not appear that he wrote a large number of letters.

CHAPTER XIII

By the late evening post came a note from Major Hanbury to ask if he might call on the following day, and Helen asked Mrs. Jocelyn's permission to receive her visitor. She was surprised that the simple request should be met by a knowing wink from Mrs. Batt, who, however, said with kindly intention that she did not mind turning out of the drawing-room for one afternoon.

"Say 'Yes,' certainly," said Mrs. Jocelyn, giving her hand a sympathetic squeeze; "and I must try to get Annie's cheek to go down before he arrives, and instruct her how to show him up to the drawing-room."

A correct manner of showing visitors up to the drawing-room was one of the points of etiquette in "the maid" that was most strongly insisted upon by both sisters. That this should be so was remarkable, for it would not be an exaggeration to say that few houses in London boasted a smaller number of callers than the temporary abodes of Mrs. Jocelyn and her sister. But there might always arrive a day when the Countess would come to see them, and there was a strenuous effort to have

everything very magnificent when Lady Parfield came to call. Even Mrs. Jocelyn sat in state upon these occasions, although her Irish humour and her frank Bohemianism broke through the unnatural restraint now and again. She it was who always trained Annie to the perfect introduction of a visitor, and it was one of the incidents attendant on the changing into a new house that she enjoyed most. "I will go to the front door," she used to say, "and ring the bell." And stepping bonnetless out upon the doorstep she would put her threat into execution, and gravely ask "the maid" if Mrs. Jocelyn was at home. This question generally hopelessly confused the person to whom it was addressed, and a fit of giggles would result.

"Take up my card," Mrs. Jocelyn would go on, unmoved, bringing out a discarded envelope from her pocket, and gravely handing it to the giggling servant behind the door. "Now walk upstairs in front of me, and fling wide the drawing-room door, and say my name distinctly."

When this small pantomime had been enacted several times, Mrs. Jocelyn considered that her maid was a trained servant, and the honour and glory of her domestic arrangements was secured.

"Major Hanbury," announced Maud on the following afternoon, and stood for a few moments outside the door to hear what was being said to the newcomer.

"Ah," said Helen, "you have come!"

Maud thought that the salutation gave evidence of the fact that Miss Graeme must have expected her caller a little earlier in the day, and she had a wholesome contempt for gentlemen who kept their young ladies waiting. But to Major Hanbury the greeting meant so much that for quite an appreciable time he had only a sense that something tremendous had happened.

"Yes, I have come," he said, in his quiet way. His manner had always about it a certain sternness of simplicity, and it had sometimes been said of him that he never made the best of himself.

Maud, still listening at the door, was disappointed, and went downstairs.

But even Maud, had she been inside the room, might have understood that words played a very small part in the greeting between the two; and she might have discerned beneath the salutation—so disappointing to a young lady who read sixpenny novelettes—some feeling not wholly possible of expression.

He looked round the little common room presently, and thought that it was not only made better by her presence, but that the casual, queer little household was beautified by her very thoughts of it. Helen probably saw nothing in Mrs. Jocelyn but a warm-hearted and devoted friend; poor Theodore himself was only to be pitied for

his blatant and pathetic self-conceit; and in Helen's eyes Mrs. Batt had more good qualities than most people had before discovered in her.

"They've all been so kind to me," she was saying to him presently, "and Mr. Batt is teaching me to write on the typewriting machine, so I really hope I may find something to do presently."

"Don't trouble to find anything yet," pleaded Major Hanbury.

He had been having a hard struggle with himself lately; his appointment to the command of the expedition to Tälung was now an accomplished fact, and any time within the next few weeks orders might come to him to start. Every one knew that the expedition was one of conspicuous danger; had he any right to speak to Helen before he started? If she should come to care for him—which he prayed God might be—what a disturbance might result if anything should happen to him. Should he wait until his return? If the expedition was successful everything might be over in seven or eight months. If not, it might take a couple of years to accomplish. His heart was insistent on the matter, and called out for some sort of certainty before he should go forth on his mission; but, on the other hand, Helen had had her full share of trouble during the last year, and to those burdens he feared to add. Also, he thought,

her idea of love was still only an abstract and beautiful thing—a thing far and away more lovely than most girls dreamed of, a sentiment all tenderness and loyalty, and faithfulness and rare unselfishness ; but as a matter of personal experience it was all uncertain. If she loved him, she did not know it yet. And Charles Hanbury was saying inwardly, with that sternness which he always showed towards himself, "It is better, perhaps, to say nothing. I may not come back."

They sat and talked long of many things, and she told him of her sisters' doings at Biarritz, of Agatha's still delicate health, and of their letters. Duncan approved of Biarritz and "the gowf," which he had played as a boy. He attended as caddy on Jean, who was learning the game, and was, as usual, faithful and devoted in his service to both the girls. Amongst the valets and the maids in the hotel he was reputed a man of vast wealth and a miser, and he was supposed to have given some disappointment on one or two occasions by not being more lavish with his money amongst the friends whom he had made. He attempted to speak French, and did so with a strong Scottish accent, and he was reconciled to the evils of life in a foreign place by finding that there was a Presbyterian church there. "Deed, mem," he said to Jean, as they left the church on the first Sunday after their arrival, "who knows but the place may be saved

yet for the sake of ten good men who are in it!"

There were letters also from Lady Parfield to show Major Hanbury. Lady Parfield was having an altogether successful campaign in Egypt, and her kind hosts, she told her nieces, were doing everything *en prince*. There seemed to be no privilege to which she had not attained during her sojourn on the banks of the Nile. Even the gates of tombs and the doors of the lesser pyramids had opened under the influence of British rank and British wealth, and it added greatly to her ladyship's satisfaction to visit even a museum on a day on which it was generally closed, and to find the key turned for her in the lock as a special privilege. In Egypt Lord Parfield could be found regretting, in the voice of his widow, the fact that for so many thousands of years the land had been sunk in heathenism; while Archibald took an intelligent, not to say an intellectual, interest in hieroglyphics and excavations.

Major Hanbury thanked Miss Graeme for allowing him to see the letter, and handed it back to her. For a man of large mind, in which petty dislikes were nearly unknown, he found with almost a feeling of surprise how much he disliked Lady Parfield. He wished with all his heart that there was some house, not hers, nor even this little hospitable, shabby place in Finborough Road,

in which during his absence she could find a home.

He was reminded of Mrs. Graeme when he found how little she fretted over things which other women might have found irksome. There was a certain courage about her which seemed to make murmuring or grumbling impossible. The small annoyances of life did not seem to fidget her, and in her nature was a very real tenderness to every sort of poverty, whether of intellect, of wit, or even of good taste. Charles Hanbury remembered a ridiculous game he had once played at a country house, in which every one had to choose a suitable telegraphic address for himself or his friends. "Fidgets" had been recommended as a name for one person, "Stick-at-iveness" as another, "Tranquillity" as a third. "I think 'Compassionate' would suit her best," Charles said to himself. He thought how impossible most people would have found the quarters where she at present lodged—the tiny bedroom, the casual, uncertain meals, the blatant Theodore, or the Irish sisters with their well-meant match-making.

In the days that followed, and as he saw more of her, he found that she had settled into a certain routine which another girl might have found hard or common. In the mornings she got up early, and Theodore looked less thin and haggard when he had begun the day on a regular breakfast, accompanied by coffee made

after one of Madame's recipes. She worked at the typewriting machine until the uncertain lunch was upon the table, and in the afternoon it became a custom with her to take Major Maskell for a walk. The poor old gentleman was growing weaker, and in a pathetic way he asked leave of her once to lean upon her arm. After that they always walked out together in this fashion, and they generally chose the quiet paths of the cemetery, where he was not pushed or jostled by crowds. Major Maskell loved the tombstones, and was a connoisseur in inscriptions. He used often to pause by a broken column or cross, and, leaning upon Helen, would point out with his stick some touching or pious words engraved upon them. She thought grief had great difficulty in expressing itself, and the effort of trying to concentrate some life-anguish into a single sentence made the words doubly pathetic. Some, she noticed, seemed to try to recall or to fix a definite memory or trait of character in the departed, while others seemed only to aim at expressing the resignation of the survivors. The graves were very close together, and the quiet folk lay in their hundreds in the midst of noisy, unrestful London. She supposed that hardly one of them had died unregretted—there was a tender feeling of sincerity in many of the inscriptions on the grave-stones—and with this thought there was removed that sense of loneliness by which

the dead are often surrounded. To Helen Graeme the two worlds, whether of the dead or of the living, were ever peopled with those who love each other.

The evenings in Finborough Road were invariably spent in playing very long games of cards for very small sums of money. Mrs. Jocelyn had lately established a curious sort of tea-dinner about five o'clock in the afternoon, and to this some out-at-elbow friends would generally drop in. They soon learned—poor souls!—that a substantial meal was served at this hour, and they would excuse their presence awkwardly, on the plea that they had only looked in for an afternoon call. Mrs. Jocelyn had something to give every one of them, and if she whisked away the tea-things unusually quickly, it was generally because some needy person was saying good-bye, and she wanted to make up a little parcel from the remains of the feast to thrust into his or her hand at the door. The leg of a chicken, or a few cold cutlets in a piece of paper often furnished the next day's dinner for a man or a woman who would otherwise have gone hungry.

Major Hanbury called often, and chaperonage being a thing not unduly insisted upon by the two sisters, he was able to take Miss Graeme out sometimes. Everything was new to her, and her enjoyment was touched with the wonder of a child. Her pleasure and interest made

sight-seeing and simple entertainments a delight, while in picture galleries he found that she had inherited much of her father's taste for art. Had any other man, he used to wonder, in the whole of London, ever had so charming a companion? Mrs. Jocelyn, who loved a little gaiety, enjoyed an occasional visit to the theatre in their company, and had "run herself up" an opera cloak to wear on these occasions. But for pictures she had no instinct whatever, and Mrs. Batt said, "Don't interfere with them, my dear; I am sure we all liked our bit of fun when we were young."

It was Mrs. Batt, whose curiosity had now got the better of her, who entered the room this afternoon after a cough and a pause on the mat outside the door. She greeted the visitor with great distinction of manner, and talked much to him of the military circles in which she had moved as a girl. Major Maskell came upstairs at tea-time, and Theodore looked in, too, after a disturbed sitting at the House of Commons. Wherever there was a meal, Mrs. Jocelyn's friends were sure to gather together.

Theodore was dressed in his usual eccentric fashion, an orange-coloured tie, and a second-hand brown velvet coat having lately been acquired by him at a very moderate figure. He told more gratuitous untruths in the course of half an hour than was common even with him; but they were of an entirely innocuous charac-

ter, and no doubt pardonable in a man whose legitimate flights of fancy were so seldom approved. His manner to Miss Graeme was semi-theatrical, and his method of expressing admiration was shown by a deliberate softening and tenderness of the eyes as he waited upon her assiduously in the style of the humble slave.

"She can't stop here," said Major Hanbury to himself as he walked homewards through the streets. "I wish Sydney Byng's sister were better; but she will be on her back in a nursing home for another three months, they say."

A fortnight later he received instructions from the War Office to start on the expedition to Tālung in three weeks' time. Half the men in the Army envied him, and he himself was too good a soldier not to feel honoured by the command of the expeditionary force. But one thing must be done before he left home, and that was to remove Helen from the now pronounced admiration of Mr. Batt, and from the obscure society in which at present her lot was cast.

He went to see Mr. Byng to talk the matter over with him, and to hear what his advice would be. Charles knew that Sydney had a better head than himself for these matters, and he experienced a sense of comfort in having his friend to discuss the subject with. He found Mr. Byng packing up to start for Biarritz to

play golf, and Major Hanbury, not being an astute person, and being besides rather absorbed in his own affairs at present, never guessed for an instant that Sydney had an ulterior motive for his visit.

"I can't go away and leave her in that house," said Major Hanbury, "that queer chap will propose to her presently."

"Now, isn't it contemptible," said Sydney Byng, ruffling up his hair, "that, being men, we can't do one single thing for her? I have always said that conventions were ridden to death, and now I know it. Still, there it is. She can't take money from us, so I suppose the only thing would be if we could find her some sort of position as companion. That sort of thing is quite different nowadays from what it used to be. Charles!" he said suddenly, "I tell you what we might do! Do you remember Herbert Rendell, who married last year?"

"I know Herbert quite well," said Major Hanbury, "but I've never met his wife."

"She's a very nice sort of woman," said Mr. Byng, "frightfully religious, and all that sort of thing, you know, which is too comic when you come to think what a wild sort of chap Herbert used to be! She's very rich indeed, and she spends as much on missionaries as would keep us both comfortably. Herbert has to submit to all that, of course. Mrs. Rendell has a charming place in the country, and she

really seems a nice sort of woman, and allows Rendell to have all his old friends down to stop. He plays cards in the smoking-room with them, while she sits in her boudoir writing cheques for missionaries."

"Miss Graeme can typewrite, I know," said Major Hanbury, a tone of eagerness in his voice, "and I have always heard that Mrs. Rendell was a nice, well-bred woman. Do you mean that she wants some one to help her write her cheques?"

"Yes, and to answer charitable appeals," said Mr. Byng. "The post-bag is stuffed with them every morning, and Mrs. Rendell, being rather delicate, is perfectly worn-out investigating cases, and writing to all the fraudulent letter-writers in the kingdom. I was down staying with them at their place the other day, and I advised her to get some one to help her, and she said she thought she would."

Major Hanbury breathed more freely than he had done for some days past.

"I'll write at once," said Sydney, drawing a blotting-pad towards him. "You'd like her to be there," he murmured, as he wrote the note. "But if Agatha will marry me," he said to himself, "no consideration whatever, not even the chance of being shot the next minute in a wild-cat scheme like this expedition, would prevent my marrying her as soon as the licence could be got. Fortunately, I was not born such a

scrupulous old crusader as my excellent friend Charles Hanbury."

"I know Rendell will let me go down to say good-bye to her," Major Hanbury was saying to himself. That seemed the most important thing at present. He would say good-bye to her, and, without binding her to an engagement, perhaps she would understand.

Mrs. Jocelyn wept genuinely and heartily when Helen's departure was at last decided upon, while Mrs. Batt reminded her that the extra expense of a guest was a grave consideration.

"As if I'd grudge the child her bread and butter!" cried Mrs. Jocelyn. "I have enough to pay my way yet," she continued, and she shook her sealskin bag defiantly in Mrs. Batt's very face.

"Still, there are others," whimpered Mrs. Batt, "and you have your own relations to think of, not to speak of Major Maskell." Mrs. Batt frequently tried to protect her sister's purse, without much result. She thought, too, that the meals had been a little shorter than usual lately, and it was impossible to "impress" proud neighbours while Nan's dress was so shabby and the Countess lingered so long abroad.

Theodore metaphorically tore out his hair and scattered it upon the carpet when the time came to say good-bye. He once more walked round St. James' Square all night, thinking of

De Quincey and Johnson, and wondered if they had endured the torments of love in addition to their other troubles. He wrote sonnets and poems, and, finding his aunt's small house unendurable in his present state, he sought shelter from the bitter weather in the reading-room of the British Museum, and in the outer hall of the House of Commons, enjoying even in his melancholy this Pisgah glimpse of politics, and emerging from the historic building with a firm conviction that England was going to the dogs. The patent sofa in the drawing-room never knew him till the small hours of the morning had struck, and even the melancholy of his outlook upon the Brompton cemetery jarred upon him as being not wholly in keeping with his own sad heart.

When the last evening of all arrived, who shall speak of, or do justice in words to, the supper which Mrs. Jocelyn prepared for that occasion? Even Major Maskell's "limit" was not insisted upon that night, and the dainties of bottled fruit and tinned meats which adorned the table were things to be remembered with feelings of satisfaction long afterwards. "It's only a cold collation," the little woman repeated nervously several times that day, in order to restrain her own fluttering pride. The meal was not only prepared, but spread upon the table by eleven o'clock that morning, and during the day it was visited in turn by Maud and the charwoman, Mrs. Batt and her son, and a large

number of friends with reversionary interests in the supper.

The party itself was select: Major Hanbury and Mr. Byng, whose departure had been postponed to permit him to make his farewell, were the invited guests, and the small party at home made up the company to seven. Mrs. Batt was dignified and ladylike, her conversation circled round the aristocracy of England, on the subject of whose comings and goings she could have passed a stiff examination. Mrs. Jocelyn admitted that her nerves had got the better of her; she fidgeted with everything on the table, and plied her guests so plentifully with food that it is to be feared that once or twice she even mixed the dainties upon their plates in a manner which a more exacting company might have resented. She filled Major Maskell's glass, and told her sister inconsequently that she didn't care a bit—he should be happy for once! And she hopped up and down from her seat quite a score of times, fetching hot plates from the fender, or diving for Bass's beer below the sideboard. Her two guests' offers of help were waved energetically on one side. "Bless you," she said, "a man's a helpless thing when it comes to doing anything!" And she even chivied Maud from the room, much to that factotum's discomfiture, she having dressed her hair to twice its usual size in honour of the occasion.

Mr. Batt was lugubrious and preoccupied:

he ousted care as best he could with a plentiful meal. The sudden conclusion which Mrs. Jocelyn put to the repast before it was quite finished was explained when she arrived in the drawing-room, and whispered breathlessly to Helen, "For two pins that young man would have made a speech!"

Maud and the charwoman and a lady friend, who had come in to help, had sent up a joint petition, "And would the liberty be pardoned, but might they come up to Miss Graeme's room to see her dressed." One of the old sumptuous gowns of long ago was worn on this great occasion, and the three shy, hard-working, toil-worn women ascended from the lower regions and crowded together at the little door, rubbing apologetically their rough hands upon their aprons, and looking in a state of breathless admiration at the radiant figure of the girl in white satin in the little shabby bedroom.

"If I had the courage to suggest," said the charwoman, "I do believe we'd see 'ow the train 'angs better if you was to stand up on a chair."

Mrs. Jocelyn became so much excited at this, and so sympathetic with the charwoman's wishes, that she dashed back into the drawing-room and brought out two more lighted candles. "I am determined you shall see her properly!" she exclaimed. "Hold up the candles yourself," she said, putting them into

Helen's hands—"hold them quite high up, and let them see your hair!"

Probably we all have a select audience, however humble, and the three hard-working women congregated in the guest's bedroom were Mrs. Jocelyn's front row and stalls. Helen, laughing, raised her arms and held the candles high up till their light caught the brown tints of her hair, and shimmered on the satin of her dress and the old lace scarf about her shoulders and the pearls round her neck. Behind her head was a dusky wall-paper adorned with some cheap prints, but candle-light is kind, and pays little heed to things outside its own immediate circle. It concentrated its powers on the girl standing on the shaky chair, and lit up her eyes and the red of her lips and the glowing colour of her cheeks. It threw soft shadows about Helen's eyes, and discovered the lights in her brown hair, and shed its rays on the dim figures in the doorway. The shabby charwoman stood behind the other two; but Maud was resplendent, and knew it. Something stirred within her, and she felt at that moment as if she could have written a sixpenny novelette. The lady-who-had-come-in-to-help was reminded of the Queen of Sheba, and said so when she returned to the kitchen; while the charwoman voiced the general opinion when she remarked, "Royalty ain't in it!"

Mrs. Jocelyn was frankly overcome by the

success of her party, and her efforts to conceal the personal pride she felt at displaying Helen to the admiring crowd at the door were quite futile. When the gentlemen had driven away from the feast in a hansom, "each with a cigar," as Mrs. Batt reported from an upper window, and the small household had dispersed for the night, she crept into Helen's room in her little red dressing-gown, and sat down, in her old fashion, on the edge of the bed. She set her candle in a dangerous position on the bed-clothes, and bent over the girl and kissed her. "I want to tell you," she said brokenly, "that I do love you, and you must always come to me when you are sick or sorry."

Helen folded her arms about the queer little figure, and caressed her, drying the good woman's tears and murmuring words of tenderness.

"You are going out into the world again," said Mrs. Jocelyn, "and goodness knows what troubles you will meet! You don't a bit seem to know how beautiful you are, and that's a danger in itself! Of course I know Mrs. Rendell is a religious woman, and all that, and she will be much more of a companion to you than I am, for I never could do much more than write my name, and add up a single row of figures. But do come back to me if they are not nice to you, and remember the world isn't such a beautiful place as you take it to be."

She began to laugh before she had half finished her warnings, and jumped up and dried her tears, saying, "I'm getting as lugubrious as poor Theodore. Well, the party was a success, wasn't it? And you had your two young men, and looked lovely! God bless you!"

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. RENDELL was laid up with one of her bad neuralgic attacks on the day that Helen arrived to begin her new duties at Froley Court. The good woman sent down many kind messages by her husband ; and a faithful maid, famous for her promptitude in lowering blinds and administering phenacetin, came to Helen's room with offers of help and an apology for her mistress's absence.

At tea-time, when Helen descended to the drawing-room, she met Mr. Rendell, and his appearance dimly recalled to her a guilty figure which she had seen creeping noiselessly out of a drawing-room with gilt chairs in it, and sneaking past Waller, standing Cerberus-like at the door, before the second item on the programme of her aunt's concert had begun. A Mr. Stewart was staying in the house, and was introduced to her, and the only other guest was Mr. Lionel Schumacher, her tenant from Arvan.

Mr. Rendell was a man who always, since his marriage, bore an expression on his face as though he had quite suddenly and unexpectedly found himself in church. His attitude

of mind suggested an uncovered head and a tip-toeing observance of ritual. He had a profound belief in his wife's goodness, but his new surroundings still puzzled and confused him, as if in his church-goings he was not yet able to find the places in his Prayer-book. Mr. Rendell had had to alter his view of many things since his marriage, and his daily life with the serious-minded Mrs. Rendell, combined with his attempt to adapt himself to her mode of thinking, had now so completely bewildered him that he agreed to every single proposal that was made to him. His frequently spoken remark that "Nothing surprised him" was an index to his inward amazement at the unaccountableness of things.

He agreed with his wife that her drawing-room was a convenient one, although, as a matter of fact, there was not a single chair in the room on which he could sit with ease; and he agreed with her that smoking was a pernicious habit, while continuing to get through a large number of cigars in the privacy of his own room. He agreed with every sort of missionary enterprise, to the amusement of his friends who had known him in India, and he had a set of appropriate remarks ready-made on the question of the authenticity of sites in Palestine, which he put to Mrs. Rendell's friends with grave seriousness. He would admit in one breath that the afternoon was cold, and in another that it was hot; but he felt

more conscientious when he could say with a sense of relief that the weather was doubtful. Even his politics had become hazy and indistinct, and perhaps the poor man's constant invitations to old friends to come and stay with him may have been due to a pathetic desire to restore his own mental balance. He never felt quite at home, nor, indeed, quite sane, except in the company of these old friends of his, and to-day he and his two guests had been enjoying a day off, by playing cards after breakfast, and endeavouring to drive a pair of valuable carriage horses tandem in the afternoon. A serious-minded old coachman, with views about the Pentateuch, had been bribed not to say anything about the damage which had been done to the team.

Mr. Rendell connected the idea of his wife's secretary with views on missionary enterprise. He expected a quiet, dull girl in a grey gown, and he had been mentally "mugging up," as he called it, a few remarks to make about Hindoo widows and Suttee. "I believe it is something beastly," he used to say, "but they all seem to like it."

When Helen descended to the drawing-room she still wore her hat and a black gown, simple as a nun's, which lay in heavy folds about her waist, and hung in long straight lines to the ground. Shyness had deepened the colour in her cheeks as she came into the room and greeted the

three gentlemen who stood in attitudes of acute discomfort on the hearthrug.

Mr. Rendell's opening remarks about the marriage laws in India died away unsaid, and Mr. Lionel Schumacher's jaw dropped as he shook hands.

"I had no idea it was Miss Graeme of Arvan who was coming," he said.

"And I had no idea I was going to meet you," said Helen. It was good to see even a usurper from her home, and she was full of questions about every one on the island. Mr. Schumacher could talk, and talk well, about his improvements. He waxed eloquent over the recreation room that he had built, and the macadam that now made the old Roman road neat and secure. Of the villagers and crofters he knew very little, as his agent managed all that, and old Meg, and Janet, and Hamish, and Dugald were unknown to him even by name. But he had built a new stone pier in the little bay, and he had had a road cut from it up to the house, so that no one need be afraid of slipping on the rocks now. The brown burn filled a reservoir, which was "much more convenient," and he had spent a good bit of money in restoring the kirk and removing the square pews from it.

Helen was afraid of the tears which she felt gathering in her eyes, but Mr. Schumacher was absorbed in the recital of his plans and his building operations, and was blissfully uncon-

scious that he made her suffer. Once, when she tried to turn the conversation into other channels, it was because, at the back of her mind, she had a vague terror that she should hear next that her tenant had improved the graveyard on the hill.

"You aren't really interested in Hindoo widows and Suttee," blurted out Mr. Rendell, in a burst of confidence; "you can't be, you know; you don't look a bit like it."

"I'm afraid I know very little about it," admitted Helen; "but I used to hear something of it from my aunt, whose first husband was much interested in such things."

"Old Parfield," murmured Mr. Rendell; "I remember him when I was a boy—one of the best old chaps that ever stepped! And then severely punished for it in the end! Well, there, you know, she's your aunt, and I don't mean to revile her. Still, if you'd only known what a good old fellow he was!"

"It was my aunt's second husband who was my relation," explained Helen.

"Was he now?" interrupted Mr. Rendell. "He was pretty well 'had' too, I imagine. Did you ever see their house down in the country? No? Well, there was a loft, you know, with a ladder leading up to it, and Archie had a fireplace put into it, and made it quite comfortable; and there he used to go, and pull the ladder up after him, and that was the only place where she could not get at him! So

she told lies downstairs in the drawing-room, without fear of contradiction, and he worked away with amazing bad smells up in the loft, so that suited both parties ; they got on quite well together, mind you," said Mr. Rendell, correcting himself, "but she introduced him too much, and Archie couldn't stand that. And then, you know, her scientific facts are pretty tall, aren't they ?"

"I have no doubt you remember your uncle quite well?" said Mr. Schumacher conversationally.

"No," said Helen, "I don't think I can have seen him after I was three years old. We never had any one to stay with us at Arvan until Major Hanbury came."

"Now, that's odd," said Mr. Rendell. "I heard from Major Hanbury this morning, and he is coming down to see us before he starts on this idiotic expedition. He will never come out of it alive, as I have told him over and over again."

There was silence after he had spoken. Mr. Rendell was congratulating himself that he hadn't said the wrong thing so far, but he was perplexed to know how to continue the conversation.

"Is it so dangerous?" said Helen at last.

"Quite mad!" said Mr. Rendell. "Oh," he added, warned, perhaps, by something that told him he was speaking of this girl's friend, "Charles has got a dozen lives! He couldn't

be in his skin now if he hadn't. He's such a cool fish, too! Gould, who was with him on that Frontier thing, told me the other day that when the bullets were flying thickest, Charles always turned up the collar of his coat. Isn't that like him?"

Mr. Schumacher and Mr. Stewart began to discuss the policy of sending out the expedition, and this soon developed into an argument on English politics in general, and Mr. Rendell crossed the room and seated himself in an uncomfortable green rep chair near Helen. "Hanbury talked of coming down to say good-bye before he started," he said, "and I wrote to him to come to-morrow, and he can run down again if he wants to say good-bye. You see, my wife has got neuralgia at present, for which," he added humanely, "I am most awfully sorry; but still, naturally, it does give one a rather more free time, so I thought if we were dragging the pond, or doing anything jolly of that sort, Charles might just as well come now and have a share in it. It is awfully interesting, your knowing him," he continued. "And fancy you being Schumacher's landlady, by Jove!"

Mr. Rendell hardly ever paused for a reply when he was amongst sympathetic souls, and somehow he felt quite sure that Helen was one of those welcome people who established his sense of sanity. He was quite certain she was a good sort, and he so nearly told her so

on the spot that he bit his lip instead, and said suddenly, "Look here, do you think it's wrong to play cards? I should like so awfully to know your views, and then I shouldn't shock you. It is one of the impossible things of life to know whether you will shock people or whether you won't, and it's a toss up whether they will look upon you as a sort of saint, or a brand, or something not even snatched at all. I am afraid I don't explain myself well."

Helen thought she had grasped his meaning, and Mr. Rendell said hopefully that he was quite sure she had.

"I like playing cards," he said, "and I do like playing for money, even if it is only a threepenny bit."

"I have been playing cards every night in London," said Helen, "and somehow I don't think it ever struck me that it could possibly be wrong. We played whist a good deal, too, up in the North, with my father. I believe he considered me and my sisters good players."

"Capital!" exclaimed Mr. Rendell. "I believe that we shall find that you and I think alike on a lot of subjects. We might have a rubber to-night, if you would make a fourth, and be a real jolly little party. Stewart leaves to-morrow, I am sorry to say, but Hanbury will be here to take his place."

Helen said she would be delighted, unless, indeed, Mrs. Rendell found herself better and

able to come down and take her place at the game.

"Well, the fact is, my wife has got scruples," said Mr. Rendell. "And, mind you," he said, "I don't see why she shouldn't have 'em if she likes. My wife, Miss Graeme, is everything that you would find it most difficult to be yourself—I mean, of course, that I should. She is a teetotaller, and a Protestant Alliance, and a Primrose League—belongs to them all, that is to say. She gives—well, I mean she almost overdoes giving to missions, and you would hardly believe the number of societies she belongs to. You may not agree with everything of that sort, but you can't help respecting any one who does."

At dressing time Helen received a kind little note from Mrs. Rendell, again apologising for not seeing her, and saying that she hoped she would not mind dining without her. She was sure her husband would make her feel quite at home, and she herself would try and get downstairs to-morrow.

Mr. Rendell became shy and constrained when dinner-time came; a fit of shyness seized him, brought on, as he explained to himself afterwards, by the fact that Miss Graeme was so extraordinarily handsome, by Jove! "Those pearls," he said, "and the way she walks and carries her head! Well, of course my wife has not seen her yet; but I hope to goodness she'll approve!"

Poor Mrs. Rendell heard with feelings of real apprehension, as she lay on her sick-bed, that her new companion could fish, sail a boat, play whist, and was beautiful besides; and she honestly made an effort to get downstairs next morning, though without any success. She sent another note to Miss Graeme's room, a little more primly worded than the first, but in it she thoughtfully placed a ten-pound note, saying that possibly her secretary might like some of her salary in advance.

Helen's heart went out to the suffering woman, and she wrote a grateful note of thanks; but her mind was full of fears of another kind this morning, and her anxiety had been aroused by a letter from Jean at Biarritz.

"Agatha seemed to get stronger at first," she wrote, "but the last few days she has not been so well, and she has had to see the doctor several times, which is very expensive. Do you think," the letter continued, "that when you get something to do, you could possibly send us twenty pounds. Of course, I don't in the least know what your salary will be, or whether I am asking impossibilities, but we have no money to pay the doctor. Mr. Byng is staying at Biarritz now, and is in a hotel near. I have seen him several times, but Agatha has not been well enough to see any one. Mr. Byng is an extraordinarily nice person. I think he is less

English than most of the people we have met, and that makes him easier to understand."

"P.S.—I think money is a very tragic thing."

Helen remembered her ten-pound note with a feeling of thankfulness, and blessed the thoughtful woman who had sent it to her. She placed it in an envelope at once, with a letter to Jean, and sealed it and laid it on her writing-table, and then she began, with knitted brows and in deep perplexity, to wonder how she could possibly get another ten pounds for her sisters at Biarritz. During the early morning she walked in the woods, deeply cogitating. Money, as Jean had said, was a tragedy. They were in debt, and at present there seemed no possible way out of it. Only the words of the Psalmist were a comfort that morning. He had never seen those who trusted in God begging their bread. Some way would be shown them out of their difficulties, some plan would be discovered whereby the other ten pounds might be obtained.

Helen read her old worn Bible when she returned to the house, and certainly it was full of comfort. She scanned her favourite verses eagerly: He would make of all mountains a way; surely that was plain enough. He would direct and control their paths; He would try them, perhaps, as silver is tried, but all for some good and wise purpose; He would

be to them as the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land—a shadow that would be over both herself and her sisters who were far away; and in that thought was the deepest comfort of all, bringing as it did those dear people nearer to her.

She went downstairs, and received some correspondence sent to her little writing-room by Mrs. Rendell, who asked her to type it; and she went for a walk with Mr. Rendell, who showed her model cottages and gardens, and told her, in one of his unexpected confidential utterances, that he didn't know who would go to Heaven if his wife did not.

"I'd back her for a front place," said Mr. Rendell with feeling; "I'd swop my chances of a crown with hers any day. You may not always understand Fanny, but you can't help respecting her."

A number of newspapers arrived before luncheon, and Mr. Schumacher, having read the racing intelligence, was in high spirits. Like most rich men he enjoyed, quite disproportionately, winning small sums of money. An outsider which he had backed had won, and Mr. Schumacher was twelve pounds richer than he had been that morning.

"If you had been a poorer man you would have lost," said Mr. Rendell; "and, what's more, you'd have put on more than a pound. Fancy only winning twelve sovereigns with a straight tip such as you had!"

"I've got a straight tip for the Grand National to-morrow," said Mr. Schumacher. "You'd better have something on, Herbert."

"Don't overdo it, Leo," said Mr. Rendell; "you might lose one of your sovereigns!"

"Who do you think will win?" said Helen, turning to Mr. Schumacher.

"Galtee Mor," he replied, without hesitation, "a horse belonging to Sir James Addie."

"And yet he was a disappointment at the National Hunt Meeting and in the Grand Military," said Helen; "but, of course, on neither of those days did the ground suit him, and certainly at Sandown he was only put up to make the running for the Abbot."

Mr. Rendell mentally decided that Miss Graeme was the sanest person he had ever met. There was some crook in people's minds, he imagined, which made them disapprove of everything which he found most charming and most delightful. But here was a girl, beautiful, and altogether refined, and with gentle manners, who could talk quite naturally and without affectation of manliness, about racing, and who seemed to know, besides, everything that was worth knowing about it.

"Well, Miss Graeme," said Mr. Schumacher, "if you are interested in the National, put a bit on Galtee Mor. He is a dead certainty."

Helen had written her letter, but had not posted it; it still lay on her writing-table upstairs. It may seem very like blasphemy to

those who have learned to put a strong dividing line between duty and pleasure, between amusements and serious things—and who certainly fix it very definitely between betting and thoughts of the Eternal—to connect the prospect of a successful wager with Divine intervention. To Helen Graeme it appeared quite natural that a way had been found for her out of her difficulties. She turned to the man who had just spoken, and said gravely, and with as little sense that her conduct was unusual as a village urchin might have had as he put his pennies into Mrs. Rendell's missionary-box, "I should like very much to put ten pounds on Galtee Mor."

All her life, and even as a little girl, she and her sisters had talked of racing news, and to win or lose meant very little to them either in the way of gain or of disappointment. It is doubtful whether they had ever handled a coin until they left their home. There was no greed or excitement in betting there on the island, but they had grown up in the enjoyment of the news of a race or a sporting event. Money procured for them nothing which they wanted, for their needs were supplied by the indulgence of an extravagant father. There were no little weekly allowances, even, to be spent on toffee-drops at a shop, and the Miss Graemes had grown up without any knowledge of covetousness; but as she staked her ten-pound note the old sporting

instinct was strong within Helen, and even now the money was not, in a sense, so much of the first importance as was the result of the race.

She was reminded of the lamplit evenings, and of the sailing boat coming across the dark waters with the news of the latest race. She saw again her father's handsome figure standing on the hearthrug, Madame in her high-backed chair, the wide, beautiful rooms of the old house, and she heard the roar of the sea outside. The telegrams and newspapers would be brought in by Duncan, who would lay them on a table, saying, "That's the lot," with a final glance inside the bag, and then he would slip the shabby brown strap over his shoulder, and wait, as he always did, to hear what the news would be. Then their father would read out the names of the winners, and congratulate his daughters on their successes, whilst receiving at the same time their quaintly spoken felicitations on his own. The few letters which had been written during the last two days would be collected, and on the morrow they would be left in the unlocked stable, the leather bag hanging on a rusty nail, as the incoming ones had been left in the afternoon, by the old man who drove the dog-cart on Melvin Island.

Money was an entirely new consideration to Helen, and it would be difficult to realise how little it had yet come to mean to her; but now her sisters were in need, and if Galtee Mor

won she would be able to send them twenty pounds. Later in the afternoon, when Mr. Schumacher had telegraphed to his bookmaker, she went up to her bedroom to take from its envelope her first earnings, which she had staked in sporting fashion to the last penny on to-morrow's race.

When she looked at her writing-table, she saw that the letter containing the notes was gone.

Its absence was easily explained. A housemaid, seeing it stamped, and thinking that perhaps Miss Graeme did not know that the post left early, and that considerable delay could be saved by sending to the neighbouring town at eleven o'clock, had put the stamped letter, sealed and lying in readiness on the top of the blotter, into the early morning post-bag, and it was now on its way to Biarritz.

"I did not intend that it should go," faltered Helen.

The woman was very sorry indeed, but Miss Graeme was busy with Mrs. Rendell at the time, and she could not ask her if the letter was meant for the post. She felt certain she was doing the right thing, as the stamps were already on the envelope and the missive was sealed. "I know," she said apologetically, "that sometimes a postal order has to go inside a letter, and if it hadn't been closed I shouldn't have dreamed of putting it into the bag. Ladies often leave their letters on that table to be

posted, and I assure you, ma'am, I have got into trouble before now for not taking them down before post-time."

"You mustn't worry about it," said Helen gently.

In the afternoon Major Hanbury arrived, and at tea-time Mrs. Rendell saw her secretary in a darkened room for a little while, gave her a few directions, and said that she hoped Helen did not feel any awkwardness in dining with the three gentlemen alone. "You can go to bed immediately after dinner," she said, in a prim but kindly way, "or come up to my boudoir if the gentlemen sit in the drawing-room."

The instructions reminded Helen of Lady Parfield's mysterious warnings, but she promised to obey them faithfully.

CHAPTER XV

THE following day was chosen by the gods as a direct refutation of the melancholy theory that the time and the place and the loved one never come together; and these beneficent personages added, besides, a special gift of weather of exceptional beauty. In London there was a dense fog: the traffic was stopped, gases burned dimly in the murky streets, and those people who could not keep safely by the fireside groped their way through the thick darkness from one house to another. Down here in the country there was a very marvel of sunshine, and the keen vigour of a late sharp frost was in the air. Every patch of grass by the roadside was a miniature white forest. Masses of traveller's joy, blurred with white frost, hung in festoons like steam-clouds fashioned by elfin fingers into tangible shapes and held there, in defiance of evaporation, in the sun. The roads were hard and crisp, and there was a thin coating of ice upon some pools in the meadows. A lark thought that summer had come, and rose up right into the blue, where it hung suspended in a rapture of song; and the

robins, whom Mrs. Rendell fed daily from the window, fought with some starved-out thrushes and blackbirds for the bread scattered for them on the terrace.

Mr. Rendell flung open the French windows of the dining-room when he descended to breakfast, and hoped Miss Graeme did not mind, but, upon his word, what a morning it was!

"If it wasn't for this confounded neuralgia of my wife's," he said, "you and she might go for a drive—the country about here is supposed to be very pretty; but Mrs. Rendell thinks the house is built on a clay soil, and that it is that which makes her so neuralgic."

Mr. Rendell did not even venture a remark upon the nature of the soil without putting his authority for the statement into another's mouth. If he had been told that the ground was chalk, gravel, or even volcanic, he would probably have accepted the statement without any access of bewilderment.

"I thought of sitting in her room, and reading to her," he went on, "because, you see, Schumacher and I have a little plan for this afternoon, and my wife being the best woman in the world, of course one wouldn't like to neglect her. So I was wondering if you'd amuse Hanbury—not that there's much in the way of amusement to offer any one down here; still"—with the almost forgotten reflection that he was speaking to his wife's co-helper in

missionary labour—"you might show him the church."

The fir branches hung low over their heads in the long drive as the two walked down to the village together, and their shadows were deep and cool: partings might come, and the world was horribly wide, but there was no sense of farewell on this happy morning. The sunshine was too beautiful for it, the air was too fresh and crisp, and, above all, the sense of intimate companionship was too immanent and too good to allow of it. The lark itself was proclaiming it a wedding morning, and his song of joy filled with rapture seemed to make the ceremony complete. Major Hanbury's face was altered by happiness, the gravity of its outlines was softened, the deep eyes under their heavy penthouse of sandy eyebrows were like a woman's in their softness, and deeper than a woman's in their abundant content. He hardly looked at the girl beside him, nor did he speak much. Silence was habitual with him, and it was enough for him that she was there. He loved the very sound of her footsteps as she walked, and, as he stood aside to let her pass through a gate, a vainer woman than Helen Graeme might have been arrested by the completeness of love and admiration in his face.

"I believe she understands," he was saying to himself, with a heart boyishly full of happiness. "I believe she understands," he repeated.

‘Helen would always understand.’ With that compassionate nature of hers she had loved him a little perhaps because he was solitary, and a shy fellow at the best of times. No one less gentle, less honest, less true would have moved him. That he had never loved before was due to the fact that he was an unconscious idealist, and that no one else had ever remotely touched his ideal of womanhood before. In her lover’s eyes there was something in her very presence that glorified things. Major Hanbury was a single-hearted man, and he had no sense of personal detachment even in moments of deep emotion; he never analysed his feelings, nor viewed them from the outside. His thoughts were exclusively of Helen on their country walk together. He was hoping that he would make her happy, and was blessing Heaven for all that she was and all that she might one day be to him.

Meantime he was listening to her, and there was much to tell—much about which to ask his advice, much of anxious debate about Agatha’s health. He listened and advised, said he had heard from Sydney Byng that the doctor’s latest reports were satisfactory, and learned with pleasure that Jean had made friends in the hotel who were kind and sympathetic to her. He thought for the hundredth time how well this sister, so little their senior, had behaved through all the difficulties which a loss of home and fortune had entailed upon

her. How strong she had been, how unselfish! Helen had never even worried in the way some women do. She was one of those, he knew, who would accept ill-fortune as fearlessly as she had accepted a storm at sea, guiding her boat across tempestuous waves and running it, he prayed God! into a fair haven at last. Even the fact that the money which the rent of the island brought in belonged exclusively to her had only seemed to make her more anxious that her sisters should have it, and he recalled with a queer thrill of emotion the night when he handed the lawyer's letter to her, advising postponement of the payment of her father's debts till things were more settled, and her quick repudiation of holding back one farthing which did not belong to her. Money meant so little to them, he reflected, but the keen sense of honour was there. Jean, poor child, had a notion that to settle up on Monday mornings was the first attribute of a gentleman.

They had reached the village and passed far beyond it without ever remembering to look at the church. The keenness of the air made walking a delight; its sharpness recalled some mountain top. Charles Hanbury was always more in tune with Nature than with men, and the beauty of this morning in the country found something joyous and responsive within him. He was more at ease in fields and on the heather than in drawing-rooms, or even

in barracks, and a certain gentleness of disposition inclined him to the weak or shy things of the natural world. A greedy thrush, caught in a tangle of twine—the remains of a boy's kite-tail—caught his attention, and made him stop to release it. Helen held the speckled, ungrateful bird, which, with open bill, resented its own rescue, while Major Hanbury disentangled the twine from the yellow feet. When the bird had flown away they laughed from very pleasure at its escape, and, like children, wished the thrush a pleasant journey home again.

"I think, if all goes well, I may be back in June," said Major Hanbury, without much relevance, except that perhaps the home-going of the thrush recalled too sharply that home-coming was very good, and, for him, very far distant. "I believe things ought to go well, if we act promptly and decisively."

"I hope all will go well," said Helen.

"I think the Rendells would let me come down and see you as soon as I arrive home," he went on; "or if your sisters are back from Biarritz then perhaps we might all meet in London."

"June seems a very long way off," said Helen.

He did not accept her words as spoken to himself—he knew what the parting between the sisters had meant to all of them; but even he, diffident though he was, was aware that he

had a place in the picture when she spoke of the meeting in June.

As they neared the house they met Mr. Rendell sneaking home through the woods, covered with mud from head to foot. He seemed to wish to avoid the public eye; but, finding himself discovered, he stopped, and, remarking that it was a beautiful morning, he inquired anxiously if he looked an awful sight.

"You seem to have collected a good bit of mud," said Major Hanbury, looking at the rueful figure with a smile of amusement.

"I didn't read aloud," said Mr. Rendell apologetically; "the fact is, my wife wasn't up to it, and as I always stick over the long words she let me off, so Schumacher and I had a chariot race—bath-chairs and donkeys—and I got pitched out, besides losing a sovereign to Schumacher. I wish that fellow wouldn't always bet in single coins, it does annoy me so! You were much more sporting, Miss Graeme," he added, "putting on a tenner. Schumacher's booky must have been surprised when the order came in."

"To-day," said Helen, turning to Major Hanbury, "Galtee Mor carries Cæsar and his fortunes."

"Then I wish the good horse every success!" said Major Hanbury. A woman would probably have added a word of warning, playful or otherwise, now that the deed was

done. Major Hanbury accepted the statement, if one may say so, as from one gentleman to another.

In the afternoon Helen again wrote letters at Mrs. Rendell's dictation in her darkened room, and tapped them out on the typewriting machine afterwards, and sent them to the post. Then came tea-time in the uncomfortable drawing-room which Mr. Rendell had learned to call the perfection of ease, and when the lamps were lighted he reproached Helen for having gone to bed early the evening before, and suggested a rubber of whist between tea and dinner.

The more modern game of bridge had not been known on the island, and owing to his long absence from England Major Hanbury knew only the older game. Mr. Schumacher was playing for threepenny points with Mr. Rendell, and was much elated at having won a shilling. His play was bad, owing to the fact that he was absorbed, to the exclusion of everything else, in admiring Helen Graeme. Major Hanbury, who was beginning to be sensitive about such matters, began to have a dimly uncomfortable feeling that the millionaire had much to offer a girl. He could give back to Helen her home and her position, and much more besides. Lionel Schumacher was a weedy-looking man, short-sighted, and with untidy hair; but, in spite of all his stinginess and his almost naïve worship of money, the man

was not a bad fellow as millionaires go. Major Hanbury became thoughtful; he was leaving the following morning to go back to London again, but an idea began to resolve itself in his mind that before he left England he must shut the gate against all usurpers. It was not possible to go away in uncertainty.

"It is a great bore you're leaving to-morrow, Hanbury," said Mr. Rendell. "When shall we see you again?"

"I'll run down again the week after next, if you will let me," said Major Hanbury. "I ought to be able to get a few days before I sail." He spoke without hesitation; it had suddenly become urgent that he should see Helen again before he went away.

"Capital!" said Mr. Rendell hospitably. "Leo is going away to-morrow also for a day or two; but we'll get him to come back, or I'll ask the parson to make up a rubber."

"Ha, ha!" said Mr. Schumacher blithely, as a servant entered carrying a small silver tray, upon which a telegram was lying. "Now to see who's won the race. . . . Now that's provoking, really very provoking," he said. "I thought Galtee Mor was a certainty, and he hasn't even got a place. This is tragic news, Miss Graeme," he said playfully, although it was easy to see that he was seriously disturbed by his trifling loss.

"Bear up," said Mr. Rendell grimly; "you've only lost a sovereign, and at the rate you're piling up threepenny points you will soon get home on the day's betting."

"Miss Graeme is the unlucky one," said Mr. Schumacher with compunction. "I wish I hadn't advised you to back him, Miss Graeme, but I really thought it was a dead cert."

He felt sorry that he had advised her to put her money on Galtee Mor; but perhaps her losses weighed less heavily upon him than his own. Women never knew the value of money, and Miss Graeme looked a very sumptuous person. He paid her a handsome rent for an island in which he had sunk no end of money, and he often wondered why on earth it was that she should go out as a companion. Mr. Rendell was more seriously vexed than he was. "Bang goes ten pounds!" he said, in a deliberately cheerful voice; "well, better luck next time."

Helen hardly heard what they were saying. With her hands lightly folded on the table in front of her she was realising that in all the world she possessed only one sovereign. It was upstairs in her room now, and her letter with the ten pounds in it was on its way to Biarritz. Mr. Schumacher was leaving on the following morning, and would probably expect to be paid to-night. Other women—women of the world, or even of business—might have thought of some way out of the difficulty;

Helen could think of none. Her face grew white, and she turned her eyes with a look of appeal in them, spontaneous and unprepared, on the man beside her.

It is in the first shock of a blow, or the first realisation of a crisis, that our thoughts turn instinctively to those who love us. The clever person, the shrewd person, may be sought later; but instinct always speaks first, and unhesitatingly places its touch, without any shadow of hesitation, on the never-failing quality of love. There was a pause in the card-playing and talk. Mr. Schumacher had begun, with a restless habit peculiar to himself, to click the ivory whist-markers up and down. There was a necessity for speech, yet no one spoke for a moment. A light laugh, or a little tactful remark, such as half the women in the world know how to make, would have been welcome just then. Mr. Rendell began to shuffle the cards. He was regretting that his wife's companion had lost so large a sum of money; but having said that it was bad luck he had no idea what else to say. Helen turned to Major Hanbury, and it seemed to him as though a storm had crashed overhead, and in the darkness and confusion a child had lifted its innocent arms to him for protection.

"Why should you go up to your room in the cold now to fetch your money?" he said. "I can settle your debt with Mr. Schumacher, and

you can bring down your purse when you dress for dinner."

She met him in the hall before the others of the party had descended from their rooms. He remembered with a smile how the three sisters, being unaccustomed to purses all their lives, had never learned to carry these encumbrances. He saw that Helen had a little pocket-handkerchief in her hand, and in the corner of it was tied one single sovereign.

"I've only got this pound," she said, handing it to him.

"The simplest plan," he answered gravely, "will be for you to keep the sovereign in the meanwhile, and let me keep back ten pounds when the rent comes in next month from Arvan."

"Thank you," said Helen; and she rolled her one poor little sovereign up in the corner of her handkerchief, and tied it in a knot.

In the evening Mrs. Rendell was able to come down to the drawing-room for a little while, so Helen did not retire early, as she had been instructed to do the previous evenings. She sat down, at Mr. Rendell's request, to finish a rubber of whist which they had begun before dinner.

And this was the scene upon which Mrs. Rendell, who was not yet feeling very strong, arrived.

By a green baize table drawn close to the ruddy light of the fire, and lit by candles in

old-fashioned silver candlesticks, sat her new secretary, playing whist with three gentlemen. She was dressed in old-world brocade, trimmed with some antique lace; her rounded white arms were bare to the elbow, and a bizarre high comb held the beautifully dressed brown hair. Helen sat in a straight-backed chair covered in green rep. An old-fashioned Scottish proverb has it that wherever The Macgregor sits is the head of the table. There was something about Helen which irresistibly suggested simply worn robes of state, and made of a common chair the fashion of a throne.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Rendell, pausing half-way across the room—"oh! I haven't seen you yet. . . . It was so dark in my room," she went on, raising troubled eyes lined with the pain of her recent headache to her husband's face. "I haven't really seen Miss Graeme till this minute."

"Still, I told you what she was like," said Mr. Rendell, in a tone of apology.

"Oh! but, my dear," said Mrs. Rendell nervously, "you don't always tell the truth."

"I hardly ever tell the truth," said Mr. Rendell hopelessly.

"Ought you to be playing cards?" said her hostess to Helen presently, when she had drawn her away from the table, and made her sit on the sofa near her by the fire. "I mean, is it quite suitable?"

"I don't know," said Helen simply. "I have never been a secretary before, so I don't suppose I know quite what is suitable and what is not; but I will not play again, if you had rather I did not."

Herbert Rendell began to gather up the cards, and Mr. Schumacher looked down abstractedly at the card-table and began to click the whist markers. Major Hanbury did not speak nor fidget, but he rose from his place and went and stood quite near Helen by the sofa.

"I think, my dear, on the whole," said Mrs. Rendell, after an awkward pause, "perhaps you had better go to bed."

She longed to have a few minutes in which to talk matters over with her husband. This girl, who had been staying in her house for the last two or three days, was utterly different from anything she had expected, and she had even been helping to entertain Herbert's old friends—a class of persons whom Mrs. Rendell condemned wholesale—and that without a chaperon! What was to be done? She did hope that Herbert would help her at this crisis. How slowly and reluctantly he was putting away the cards! And, oh, if Mr. Schumacher would only stop clicking the whist markers! She hoped that after Helen had gone upstairs the gentlemen would take a hint and depart. But, the hour being early, neither of them suggested quitting the drawing-room just yet, and she sat in an agony of mind on the sofa.

Mrs. Rendell had a nervous neuralgic temperament. She was always apprehensive, and indecision was a torment to her. One half of her life was spent in regretting the things she had done, and the other half was given over to repentance for things which she had left alone. A morning of torturing indecision would result, perhaps, in some impulsive action in the afternoon which the evening was spent in regretting. Her zeal for missionary work was perhaps her only solace in a life painfully devoid of any satisfaction; to missionise the world seemed to be a plain command, and a plain command was the only comfort and consolation in a much distracted life.

"Oh, Herbert," she murmured to her husband presently, "couldn't you get them to go to the smoking-room?"

Mr. Rendell said, with an elaborate attempt at feeling at his ease, "Do you feel inclined for a smoke?"

Mr. Schumacher stopped clicking the whist markers, and said airily, "Well, we've both got an early start to-morrow morning." He began to bid his hostess good-bye, as he would not see her at breakfast-time. With an undefined feeling that Miss Graeme was in trouble, and would perhaps "get wigged" for playing cards, he spoke up bravely for the girl, and said what a pleasure it had given him to meet her.

"I rent her place in the north, you know," he said.

"Indeed," said Mrs. Rendell, "it seems to be assumed that I know a good deal, but as a matter of fact I know nothing at all."

Major Hanbury scraped his throat deeply, and Mr. Schumacher, feeling with more certainty than ever that "something was up," went blundering on.

"It was all my fault, really," he said, endeavouring to draw the blame to himself, "that she lost all that money on Galtee Mor; but, honestly, Mrs. Rendell, I thought the horse was a dead cert."

Major Hanbury was not an astute nor even a particularly tactful person, but at this moment he resisted a temptation to bundle Mr. Schumacher out of the room. He cut in briskly with his own good-nights and good-byes, and Mr. Rendell, in answer to a frantic summons made in dumb show from his wife, sent the two gentlemen off to the smoking-room, and remained behind in the drawing-room with her.

"Oh, Herbert," said Mrs. Rendell, "this is awful!"

"I can't help it," said Mr. Rendell hopelessly. "Really, Fanny, I don't see how I can help it."

"She is—absurdly good-looking, to begin with," said Mrs. Rendell, "and Mr. Byng never said a word about that in his letter."

"Still, I don't call that any drawback myself," said Mr. Rendell judicially.

"But card-playing and betting, Herbert!" exclaimed his wife, "those are things which we never dreamed of. I'm sure she won't do!"

"I shouldn't do anything hurriedly," protested Mr. Rendell nervously.

"How much did she lose?" said his wife.

Mr. Rendell was a sportsman. "Oh, that's her own business!" he said. "I don't think we've got to interfere with what she does with her money."

"Did she pay?" pursued his wife relentlessly.

"Why, of course!—of course!" said Mr. Rendell. "At least, to tell the truth, I believe Hanbury settled up with Schumacher. He is a very old friend of Miss Graeme and her sisters, you understand, so of course that was the right and proper thing to do. It was only a trifle, after all," he said airily, spreading out his hands.

"I am not sure that I believe you, Herbert," said Mrs. Rendell.

That night sleep forsook the eyes of Mrs. Rendell. She was a good woman in every sense of the word—dutiful, religious, and kind-hearted. Hundreds of charitable enterprises appealed to her, and hardly ever appealed in vain. She was goodness itself in the parish, and no case of distress, however undeserving, was ever sent from her doors. But she had a conviction, which she shared with many other

good women, that no one in receipt of a salary should ever be touched with the feelings, still less with the failings, of humanity at all. A salary, according to her, and according to many other people, could only be earned by perfection; hence it was absolutely necessary, for one thing, that no one who earned it should ever be even temporarily disabled by ill-health. Mrs. Rendell often warned girls going out into the world that it was no use trying to do anything if you were not strong. Again, it was hardly proper for the wage-earner to have a love affair; also, she must hold orthodox views upon all points, or else keep her views to herself. Unpunctuality, of course, could not be thought of for a moment, while any desires for the joys of life must be put sternly aside. A spring afternoon must not entice the earner of a salary to go out, nor must news of a ball tempt her feet to dance. And no doubt such perfection is often attained, but at some cost.

Mrs. Rendell certainly was sorely tried. She had found, to begin with, that her secretary was beautiful; secondly, that she dressed well; thirdly, that she had a natural joy in dancing; fourthly, that she played an excellent game of whist; fifthly, that she was a landowner in the north of Scotland; sixthly, that she expended those almost sacred coins known as "salary" in betting on races. A salary might be used to dress neatly, to support an aged mother, or even to pay for a quiet and refreshing holiday;

but that it should be expended in any other way seemed almost like robbery of an employer.

"If she can afford to bet," said Mrs. Rendell to herself, with a wonderful display of logic, "she can afford to do without a salary."

It was a miserable night that the poor woman spent. She hated to think of sending Helen away; and yet, was she a good example to the servants, or to the Friendly Girls? Or was she quite the sort of girl to have in the house while she herself was so often sick and ailing, and Herbert filled the bachelor bedrooms with his own old friends? She was horribly perplexed, and at the back of her mind, whose workings she knew only too well, she was aware that whatever line she adopted would be a matter for regret. "If I send her away," she argued, "I shall be miserable, and if I keep her I shall be miserable." She turned restlessly on her bed, and felt her head beginning to ache again. Just about the dawning, and while the house was hardly astir, a brilliant thought came to her, by which she would be able to shift some of the weight of responsibility from her own over-burdened shoulders to another's. She knew Lady Parfield a little, having helped by the humble means of her purse certain charitable projects which Lady Parfield assisted with her name.

"I will write to her as soon as I get up in the morning," said Mrs. Rendell to herself; and finding in this solution of the problem, at least,

no ground for immediate regret, she turned her face away from the light which was beginning to peer through the blinds, and was able to sleep a little.

Her letter was as kind, as undecided, and as contradictory as her neurotic temperament allowed.

"I don't mean to say that I am making any complaint," she wrote to Lady Parfield; "I would not do so for worlds. But I do think I ought to tell you just what is going on, because it does seem so unusual for a girl in her position to play cards and to bet. Besides which she really dresses too well for her station, and I feel she would be remarkable anywhere, even suppose I were to take her to some little parties in the neighbourhood. Do not take any notice of this letter if you think it better not; I don't want to get the poor girl into trouble, and I know Major Hanbury settled up her debt with Mr. Schumacher, so that at least it is paid. I hate troubling you, but I think some of her own people ought to know.

"P.S.—Please don't write to Miss Graeme, if you think it unwise; but just send her a line, which I am sure will be all that is necessary.

"PP.SS.—We really like the girl; she is very sweet and docile."

CHAPTER XVI

THE next fortnight was passed in a good deal of tranquillity and quiet happiness. Mr. Rendell showed a kind man's goodness of heart towards the stranger within his gates, and a warm friendship sprang up between him and Helen. He treated Miss Graeme almost as a younger sister, and the two were often companions together on walks or drives.

"If we go up to Scotland this year, you must come with us," he said, "and help to beguile some trout out of the water for us. Schumacher says your people up at Arvan say that there isn't a fisherman in the North to beat you."

Mrs. Rendell was kind too, in a hesitating, neuralgic way. Helen's strength was a firm rock for the little woman to lean upon, and even the sight of her glowing health brought a sense of vigour with it to the delicate woman. Prudence urged, however, that first impressions were nearly always right, and warned her that personal liking must not count for approval. Still, Mrs. Rendell, in spite of those sins against salary which Miss Graeme too often committed, was bound to allow that the girl's presence was a daily pleasure in the

house. Not only was her voice gentle when she read aloud, but her knowledge of books was much more extensive than Mrs. Rendell's own, and she became eager to get this volume or that, and found new interests every day in her prescribed invalid life. She began to regret the letter she had written to Lady Parfield, and she sent two others after it as wavering and uncertain as the first; and even these irresponsible uncertain epistles were repented of as soon as posted. There was but little rest and no sense of satisfaction in this poor woman's life. Even her very sincere religion failed to comfort her, and she loved to meet clergymen to whom she could confide her difficulties about some of the contradictory statements in the Bible. A divine who could reconcile opposing texts might ask what he liked from Mrs. Rendell.

Probably, however, she had never been happier, had she but known it, than during the time that Helen Graeme spent with her. "You seem to face things in such a wonderful way," she said to her one day, with a sigh. "I do envy your want of uncertainty." She had half a mind to tell her of her letter to Lady Parfield, but finally decided that it would be better not to do so. Letters, for instance, were often lost in the post out to Egypt, and so full was Mrs. Rendell of apprehensions and doubts that often when she put a hardly written letter into the post-box, it was with a half-formed wish that it might miscarry.

As a matter of fact, Lady Parfield's letter arrived quite safely, and Helen received a long answer to it, while Mrs. Rendell herself got quite a short little note.

Lady Parfield's envelope with its well-known writing lay on the top of three letters which Helen received by the next morning's post. There were two others underneath it—one from Agatha, and one from Major Hanbury, so that her aunt's epistle, although it came first, was the last to be read.

"I have got," said the first letter, "two days' leave, and am coming down to say good-bye to-morrow. I hope you may be at home when I arrive; my time is very short, and I do not want to waste any of it. I ought to reach Froley about two o'clock on the day you get this. May I hope that if you are not busy you will be so good as to go for a walk with me in the afternoon?"

Then came Agatha's letter. Agatha was better; she had sat out in the garden of the hotel for a little while in the sunshine to-day, and Mr. Byng had called; and to-morrow, if it was fine, he was coming to take them for a drive. Mr. Byng was a great comfort; ladies in the hotel pretended to be afraid of him, and said he was gruff, and they used to laugh over this when they were together, and have great fun. Indeed, everything was looking happier now than it had done for a long time. Somehow, you could not feel sad while the

sea was so blue and the sand so yellow and the sun so bright overhead. Mr. Byng had taken her down to the plage one morning, and they had sat there in the sun. Mr. Byng had a store of books with him; Mr. Byng's man-servant generally came round in the morning to see if he could do anything for them, or to bring them flowers. Mr. Byng sent his love to Helen, and Agatha bade her good-bye, and remained her most loving sister.

Last of all, there was Lady Parfield's letter to be read.

"MY DEAREST HELEN," wrote her ladyship, "I must say I am more upset than I can say by the news which reached me from Mrs. Rendell this morning. I can hardly believe that any niece of mine or of poor Archibald's could have behaved with so little sense of decorum or of the usages of society. Mrs. Rendell tells me that you play cards with gentlemen in the evenings, although she is not there, and that you bet large sums of money on races. This is unheard of in any one in your position. But of course the only thing which seriously matters, and about which I am now writing to you, is this matter of your accepting money from Major Hanbury. I do not wish to be too hard upon you, and of course, if the story gets about, I shall plead your strange upbringing as an excuse; but surely even you

must see that no nice girl would ever take money from a gentleman.

"The world, of course, will put its own construction on the affair, and I feel that were I at home I might be able, with a little tact and management, to put things straight and explain things to people. But as that is impossible, my only advice to you is to marry Major Hanbury, and to get engaged to him as soon as possible. This will stop all tongues, and if I find that things are being said, I can always give it out that you have been engaged to him all the time, or at least that there has been an understanding between you. I hear that you were seen with him at galleries, etc., when you were in London in October, and of course this doesn't help to make things any better. I am really distressed about it, and I think you can hardly realise what you have done.

"Your affectionate aunt, SELINA PARFIELD.

"P.S.—If you are in London again, it would be just as well not to be seen about with Mrs. Jocelyn or Mrs. Batt. Write a few pretty notes to the most exclusive of my friends, and go to their houses as much as possible. You cannot be too particular after all that has happened."

There is a tragedy in many young girls' lives which is rarely touched upon in books, and to which but scant sympathy is accorded in real life. It is the moment when an untarnished

nature is confronted with a sense, dim, disproportionate, terrifying, that there is something unknown and evil in the world. The hours which are spent within the shadow of this dark spectre are never spoken of. No one knows anything about it, except, it may be, some pitiful spirit, a guardian angel, or the shade of a dead mother who watches near. Souls are born in this hour; the prayers that are said beside a sleeping child's cot are perhaps answered now. The solitude and terror of the experience are not expressed, even years afterwards. "Lord, have mercy on the young," said an old preacher, "for grief is very hard till a cry becomes a prayer." But grief itself is not so difficult as darkness, nor is sorrow so hard of understanding as sin.

Over Helen's face there spread a flush that dyed even her forehead crimson, and she stretched out her arms on the table and buried her head in them. Her hair fell about her, covering her burning cheeks, and mercifully hiding her eyes with their look of fear in them. At first the withering sense of something unknown but sinister prevented even the clemency of tears.

"What have I done!" she cried, when at last sobs came to relieve her—"what have I done!"

Her life had been singularly detached from the world. She knew nothing of claptrap honour, nor of malignant whispers, but had

grown up mentally as well as physically straight and tall as a white birch on the mountain side, finding good—as it is promised the pure in heart shall find it—in everything. Now the silver bark of the birch was being torn and bruised ; the smoke of cities tarnished it, its head was bowed.

All the morning her inward cry was still the same. She wondered if her sisters would be ashamed of her also ; and, while longing to tell them of her difficulties, she feared to let them know that she had done something disgraceful. Mercifully the morning was her own, in which to do as she liked. She wandered far into the depths of a wood, and sat down heavily on the dry scented needles of some pine-trees. Major Hanbury probably thought her wicked, too, and Mr. Schumacher and Mr. Rendell ; they all knew she had accepted money from Major Hanbury, and he would be gone to Tälung before she could even hope to pay him back. She thought of Mrs. Jocelyn, and wondered if she would be able to lend her the money. But the generous sealskin bag was emptier than usual, she knew, and she doubted very much whether, with any amount of self-denial, the actual money would be forthcoming.

“If only I had known it was wrong,” she murmured to herself ; and even while she grieved, it says much for her that she never blamed the man who had offered her money “I suppose,” she said to herself, “that it was

the only thing he could do ; if I hadn't borrowed from him I should be in debt to Mr. Schumacher, and that would be much, much worse."

She had taken money from Major Hanbury, and, therefore, she must marry him ; the whole smirching of her love-story came upon her while she had barely realised that she loved. Now her love must be given in reparation for a fault ; it was a debt to be paid, and she had never failed to pay her debts. She shivered a little as she sat in the dim stillness of the woods, and it was with a face pale as any ghost's that she returned to the house.

The sight of her pallor decided Major Hanbury once and for all, and without any manner of doubt, to tell of his love before he went away. He had no thought that the pale cheeks were in any way connected with his departure. He knew that if Helen loved it would never show itself with the wearing of the willow or of rue. But he guessed that she was anxious about her sisters, and his old instinctive dislike to Lady Parfield made him wonder suspiciously if she had had any hand in this change which he saw in her.

They set out for their walk silently at first ; the spring was gone out of Helen's step, and she walked listlessly, as though she was tired. Major Hanbury never waited for opportunities ; he made them. He led up by no explanation or suitable conversation to the subject which he had in hand. He never spoke at all, as a matter

of fact, until they were deep in the heart of the fir wood once again, and then he stopped short in the path where they were both walking, and said, "I love you so much, Helen, that I cannot go away without telling you so. When I come back, will you marry me?"

Then Helen saw quite plainly what had happened. Lady Parfield had written to him as well as to herself, and this loyal friend of hers, so tried and so trusted, had come immediately to put things right in the eyes of the world, and to allow her to make what reparation she could. He saw as plainly as Lady Parfield did that the debt had to be paid, and being an honourable gentleman he was going to allow her to pay it.

"Yes," said Helen steadily, "I will marry you."

Major Hanbury was a humble lover; he never expected protestations. He told his bride all that he intended to be to her, all that he hoped to do, and, standing before her in the woodland path, he said to her, as a crusader of old might have declared his faith before the cross on the sword-hilt, "All my life I only ask to serve you; I want to stand between you and everything that is hurtful or cruel in the world; I want to keep you from anything that can distress or annoy you, and I will do this, God helping me, all the days of my life."

"You are very generous," said Helen. "I wish that it had been possible that we were to be married before you leave."

His eyes softened, and he stooped and kissed her on the lips. "You are too good to me," he said, in his short way, but with a husky sound in his voice.

Perhaps if they had said more to each other, or if the interview had been prolonged, he might have gleamed some knowledge of what was in her mind; but they were interrupted by Mr. Schumacher, who, on the plea that it was immediately going to rain, had followed Miss Graeme with a cloak and umbrella. He walked with them through the sharp shower that followed, and Major Hanbury, while resenting his presence, could excuse his care and fussing over Helen now, and could waive his right to serve her in small matters.

In the evening some country neighbours came to dine, and the two people who were most near to each other in spirit were separated by the length of a long flower-decked dinner-table. A city gentleman who had lately acquired a property in the neighbourhood sat next to Helen. He was an elderly man, with a fatherly and delightful manner, who had made a huge fortune in the city, and was now spending it right royally in the country. He talked a good deal about his possessions, and the jewels and horses which he was bestowing on his wife. "I got her tiara in Paris," he said, with ingenuous pride; "but you'll excuse my saying, young lady, that I haven't yet bought her anything so fine as your pearls."

"They were my mother's," said Helen, fingering the long chain with a caressing touch; "she always wore them, and my father gave them to me some years ago."

"A very valuable present," said the City gentleman. "You ought to keep an eye on those jewels if you are travelling about anywhere; they are worth perhaps more than you know. Take my advice, and wear them under your dress if you are going by train. It is extraordinary how news travels; and I daresay there may be people now, whom you little suspect, who know to a penny what those pearls are worth."

"Their value always seemed to me," said Helen, "that they were my mother's.—Are they worth much money?" she asked suddenly and eagerly.

"I shouldn't like to say off-hand what they are worth," said the City gentleman, "but if any day you are up in London and wanted to know, I could take you to some respectable firm and have them valued."

"Do you mean some one would buy them from me?" said Helen.

The pearls were hers. She might do as she liked with them, and all this time she had been carrying a fortune round her neck, while Agatha and Jean were counting every sixpence that they spent in a little *pension* in Biarritz; and she herself had got into a horrible difficulty from which only Major Hanbury's chivalry had

released her. The evening passed in a dream; the guests left; to-morrow Major Hanbury would be leaving also, and there was not time to take the pearl necklace up to London and sell it. She went to her room when every one had parted for the night, took off her pearls before the looking-glass, and held them, a soft delicate milky mass, in her hand. There was no time to spare, yet whom could she ask to buy the pearls? She remembered Herbert Rendell's habit of getting up early in the morning, and she descended to the breakfast-room long before the gong had sounded, and found her host walking up and down the sunny terrace in front of the house, with a couple of terriers at his heels.

"I want to ask you something," said Helen almost breathlessly. She had the pearls twisted about her fingers, and dropping in pale loops from her hand. "Will you help me?"

Mr. Rendell took his morning pipe out of his mouth, and said, "Just tell me what you want; it will be a very funny thing if I can't do it for you."

He had come to have a very real affection for the girl with her straightforward ways and her curious, simple, half-regal kindness and affection towards him and his wife. "She couldn't take a back place," he used to say sometimes, "even if she played Cinderella in the kitchen! And, by Jove! I like her for it. I can't bear the creeping sort!"

"I want to sell my pearls," said Helen. "Mr. Burgess, who took me in to dinner last night, told me they were very valuable; but I do not know where to take them or what to do with them."

"Why, come now," said Herbert kindly, "it won't do for you to sell your mother's pearls, you know. If it is a question of salary, we'll settle that up right enough."

"I want to have the money very soon," said Helen. "It really won't be much use to me unless I have it at once."

Mr. Rendell took the pearls from her hand and held them in his own for a moment, and then, for they were in full view of the house, he slipped them into the pocket of his shooting-jacket.

"Look here," he said, "you mustn't be hard-up and not let us know, you know; that would never do."

"I cannot take money from you," said Helen beseechingly.

"Make it a loan," he said, smiling kindly; and then, when he saw the distress that this suggestion caused her, he added quickly, "I mean a loan on the pearls, of course. Those things are often done. You give me the pearls, you see, and I give you whatever you want on them." He and his wife between them, Herbert thought, could easily arrange this matter later. Meanwhile, he would give in to this scrupulous young lady in so far as to keep the pearls in

his pocket and hand her out whatever cheque she wanted for her immediate need. "Would fifty pounds settle the matter?" he said, smiling. "It is not a great deal of money to offer you on the necklace, but at least I can hand over the fifty quid to you this very moment, if you want it. Come into my den for a moment, and I'll give it to you."

"And you are quite sure that this is honest?" said Helen, raising her eyes to his; "no one could possibly say that there was anything wrong about it?"

"On my honour, no!" said Herbert Rendell. "Of course no one could say a word about it."

Mr. Rendell might be perplexed about many things, but his sense of honour was clear enough, and his word could be trusted. Helen gave almost a sob of thankfulness as she thrust the notes into the pocket of her dress; while Herbert decided that, all things considered, the fairest thing would be to say nothing about the transaction to any one.

He talked more than usual at breakfast to cover any embarrassment that Helen might be feeling, and her silence and Major Hanbury's were not even noticed by him.

"I wish you were staying longer, Charles," he said, "or that we could at least drink your health at dinner to-night; I don't approve of this expedition, and I have always said so, but I wish you the best of luck and a safe return."

"You sail to-morrow, don't you?" said Mr.

Schumacher, not without a sense of relief in his voice. He had fallen honestly in love, and having an invincible belief in the value of pounds, shillings, and pence, he was not altogether to be blamed if he was sanguine as to the success of his suit. Not only had he a large fortune to offer a penniless girl, but he was the present occupier of her own estate in the North, and the young man was not without many happy and creditable projects for Helen's welcome to her old home. He planned extensive improvements in his own mind, and longed to give her the pleasant surprise of seeing what he had done.

After breakfast, in spite of some manœuvring on Mr. Schumacher's part, Major Hanbury and Helen set off for a walk together, and Leo, who believed that all is fair in love, rather curtly refused Mr. Rendell's suggestions for entertaining him, and hailed the disappearing figures with the request that he might walk with them.

"Rendell's busy," he said, in a light tone of apology for thrusting his company upon them, "and I thought, if I wouldn't be in the way, perhaps you wouldn't mind my coming with you."

He was a well-intentioned young man in many ways, but his knowledge of good manners had not long been acquired, and the primitive man in him meant fighting. His father had fought for the patch of ground in New Rush which had made his colossal fortune, and the realisation that there might be something better

than to win, is perhaps generally the outcome of an older ancestry and more gentle breeding than his.

He talked intelligently and unaffectedly about mining matters and shares, and it is possible he even believed that in time Major Hanbury might see that he was a little in the way, and might give him a chance of continuing his walk with Miss Graeme alone.

Major Hanbury defeated this object in an unexpected manner by asking Helen if she could give him a few minutes' private conversation upon some important matters before he should have to leave for the station ; and to this, with almost unnecessary alacrity, Mr. Schumacher thought, she assented.

They returned to the house, and Mr. Rendell called out from the dining-room window, "Come in and have a bit of early lunch before you start, Charles." Major Hanbury declined luncheon, and, having dropped Mr. Schumacher, he and Helen Graeme went into the conservatory together to spend what little time remained to them before the departure of the train.

The conservatory at Froley was a large and sumptuous place, more like a winter-garden than a greenhouse. There were basket-tables in it and lounge chairs, and some Persian mats covering the floor gave it a sense of comfort and colour. In the cold weather Mrs. Rendell often sat here, for the warmth of the heated moist air did her neuralgia good. There were

palms and giant tree-ferns in the conservatory, and seats with Oriental draperies thrown over them.

Major Hanbury and Helen sat down side by side on one of these. The time for good-bye had come, and there was something numbing in the thought of it. To Major Hanbury the hour was one not very short of anguish.

"Is it really good-bye?" he said at last, and found that he could say no more. This girl, who only yesterday had promised to link her life with his, was to be parted from him for months, perhaps for years. No one could foretell how the expedition would prosper. He had a hundred things to say to her, and most important of all, putting his own feelings on one side, he wished to make plans for her while he was away. She and her sisters, he thought, as soon as the others returned from Biarritz, must take the Pagets' cottage in the country again if they could get it. He would try and see the Pagets himself to-night in London. There was so much to arrange and to think about while the precious minutes rushed by.

And all the time Helen said nothing at all. She sat dumbly beside him, while her hand, which had guided so fearlessly a boat in a storm of wind, or had held her rod while she whipped the pools up in the North, was trembling pitifully. Her bent head had not been raised, nor had her eyes met his. She was feeling in the folds of her dress, and presently she

brought some notes from her pocket, and sat with them for a moment in her hand without speaking. Time was tearing on; the carriage which was to take Major Hanbury to the station would soon be at the door, and there was no leisure for explanations, hardly a moment even in which to make plans for her. He would write fully to-night, but meanwhile he must say some of the things which he was longing to say. He began with some words of love that were speaking so loudly in his own heart that his ears seemed shut to all else, and then he found that in a breathless, unusual, excited way Helen was saying something to him almost before he had finished. Her hands had begun to flutter again, and the scarlet colour had mounted to her cheeks.

"I want to pay you back," she said, "what I borrowed from you before you go away."

"I had forgotten the debt," he said.

Then, finding that she was pressing two banknotes into his hand with eager insistence and a beseeching gesture, he took them from her with gentle gravity and placed them in his pocket-book.

"And we are no longer engaged," said Helen.

The words hurt him so horribly that he said loudly, almost fiercely, "You cannot mean this!" Then, after a pause, he released her hand which he had taken in his own, and said more quietly, "It shall be as you wish, of course."

"We are both quite free," said Helen; "we owe nothing to each other."

He repeated after her, "We owe nothing to each other."

"You did all that was right, all that was good," said Helen, raising her head and speaking more quickly than she generally spoke.

He had no idea what she meant; the pain of his disappointment was so great that it was like some physical hurt which tempted him to wince and cry out, and because he was afraid of doing this he sat silent. For the moment he found realisation impossible. The last twenty-four hours had been filled with a joy so tremendous that the solitary man, whose life was not wholly attuned to happiness, had found the actual realisation of it difficult. He had never known until he met Helen how much in need he was of sympathy, and how poor even his success as a soldier seemed until he had won her approval of it. It had been almost impossible fully to realise the fact that all his life long this radiant, tender, beautiful woman would be near him, loving him as he loved her, caring for all that concerned him, willing to let him serve her. He was a man with whom to love twice would have been impossible. There was no other woman in his life to compare with Helen; he had had no smaller disappointment which he had got over. In his busy life the thought of matrimony had not indeed often entered. Women, he believed,

found him dull ; it was difficult, after his long periods of absence from England, to connect himself readily with the current topics of the day, or to interest them with his conversation. In Helen Graeme he had found a woman not wholly concerned with current topics, nor formidably up-to-date. Her tales of old heroes appealed to his own natural chivalry ; he could understand the things that she talked about, as he never was able to understand the point of view which so many modern young women presented to him. He loved the large gentleness of her thoughts, her pity for the weak and the suffering, her kindling love for all that was honourable and good in the world.

And now with fluttering hands and flushed cheeks she sat before him like a culprit, asking to be released from her engagement to him.

Major Hanbury was an inarticulate man. It may be that we have learned to associate this peculiarity of Englishmen with something that is admirable and restrained in its very reserve, and we have forgotten that after all speech is for the most part the plainest and most convenient vehicle for transferring thought. We think and believe that the chattering foreigner loses half his force by his very wordiness, and we have come to the conclusion that even a grunt of assent is infinitely better and more weighty than a torrent of affirmation. But here comes a little touch of tragedy into the situation—a flaw in our wholly sincere

convictions; silence may be interpreted one way, or it may be interpreted another. The man who speaks little, blunders little; but there may come a moment in which he would give all that he possesses for this little valued power of articulation.

"If you have mistaken your own feelings——" he began, and then paused, not knowing, in truth, how to continue. He had had always too little belief in himself, too low an opinion of his powers to please. If Helen had discovered that she did not love him it was no manner of fault in her. His dearest wish then was not to distress her, not to force himself upon her. His love was of too humble a description to enable him to plead for himself. He was considerably older than Helen—a grave, stern man, without, perhaps, very much to recommend him to a girl's heart. Helen, he thought, had discovered this almost as soon as she had said "Yes" to him. Even as she promised to be his wife she had seen that this thing could not be. Her very youthfulness protested against it, no doubt. He wondered miserably how he had ever dared to ask her to marry him.

"Don't worry about it," he said at last as he rose to go, and his face was white and his eyes were dimmed with a very tragedy of loss as he said it. "Don't let me think when I am away that you are troubled or in any distress."

The carriage was at the door, and Herbert

Rendell was calling him. Major Hanbury stood up straight and erect like a soldier at attention, or as a man who is mortally wounded will stand upright on his feet before he falls. He held out his hand, and said "Good-bye ! "

"Good-bye !" said Helen.

Just at the very end something happened which dimly puzzled him at the time, but which afterwards, when he was up in the snows of the mountain passes and beset by foes, or when the camp was still about him at night, began to kindle in his heart like the cold grey ashes which one finds at dawn with one tiny spark of life in the heart of them.

As the insistent voice of his host called to him, and he turned towards the door of the conservatory, he heard behind him a step on the stone floor, and Helen was beside him. She seemed as though she wished to say good-bye to him again, and he turned where he stood and gravely held out his hand to her. She took it within her own. She was a woman to whom men paid homage even in the little acts of daily life ; she had never had to stoop for admiration. Her kindness, even, had in it an unconscious touch of courtliness ; her humility gave a dignity to the lowest place. For her men might die fighting. It was to women of her type that they brought their shields.

Now she bent her head a little, and taking his hand in both hers she raised it to her lips and kissed it.

It may have been an act of pure pity on her part. He thought that probably it was. She had hurt him, and she wished to heal the wound in whatever way she could.

He did not hope anything from it, but only knew that she had been kind—divinely kind, as she always was. But there was no reason for her to make any change of mind at the last moment; she was not the sort of girl to do that. She had broken off her engagement with him, but, God help him! she would do it as kindly as she could.

Mr. Schumacher became quite charitable about the departed soldier as soon as he was safely out of the house. He found many kind things to say about poor Hanbury, whose job he would not have undertaken for any money in the world, and, feeling that his way was now quite clear before him, he proposed to Helen Graeme within a few days of her lover's departure, and was rejected.

Thereupon Mr. Schumacher lost his temper and felt very much aggrieved, and he carried the whole of his woes to Mrs. Rendell, and told her that he had been very badly used.

Mrs. Rendell sympathised, and quoted a verse from the Bible to the effect that Mr. Schumacher might become ennobled through suffering. To which Mr. Schumacher replied, without much good manners, that that was all very well, but he didn't think he had been fairly treated.

By the time he had worked off his spleen in a long conversation with his sympathetic hostess he felt better, and was sufficiently recovered to apologise for having said anything against Miss Graeme. But Mrs. Rendell was troubled in spirit again; her secretary was really not fitted for her post. It was all very perplexing and dreadful, and she hoped plaintively that there would be nothing more of this sort, as her nerves were not in a state to stand it. She was not a worldly woman, she hoped; but surely it was very odd for a girl in Miss Graeme's position to refuse the large fortune that had been offered to her, and Mrs. Rendell could only account for it and for Helen's unfortunate practice of betting and for her tasteful dressing by supposing that she must have considerable means. Following upon this solution of the difficulty, and whilst her poor nerves were still in a much agitated condition, she learned by a mere chance that her husband had lately lent Miss Graeme fifty pounds. This was followed by a night of sleepless unrest on the unfortunate lady's part, and in the end, having consulted her clergyman on the ethical bearings of the case, and her doctor upon its likely effect upon her own health, she decided—at least, she thought she had decided, if she did not change her mind—that Helen had better be replaced by a more suitable lady secretary. An overpowering attack of neuralgia followed, and in the end Herbert was summoned

to her darkened room to say whether in his opinion a quieter, more homely girl would better fill the task of answering charitable appeals and writing cheques for missionary labours.

"She is much too handsome," wailed Mrs. Rendell from the dark corner of her room, where not even a ray of light was allowed to disturb her sensitive eyes. "I can't take her anywhere, not even to church, without people remarking upon her."

Mr. Rendell said hopefully that all that might tone down in time; he didn't think, for instance, that Miss Graeme had been looking well for the last little while.

"If she is going to be ill too, I'm sure I don't know what I shall do!" said Mrs. Rendell.

"I shouldn't say exactly ill," pleaded Herbert, "but she has looked white, you know, and has lost a lot of her vigour, and seems tired."

"I don't like that sort of thing at all," said Mrs. Rendell, her instinctive belief in the necessity for a cast-iron constitution in a wage-earner coming to the front again.

"Of course, one doesn't exactly like it; but still——" said Herbert helplessly.

"I can't think what she does with her money," said his wife, nervously suspicious again.

"Well, she's got an invalid sister, for one thing," said Mr. Rendell, pleading this legitimate expense with a renewal of hope.

"If only one could feel sure that it went

to her!" said Mrs. Rendell, turning her head wearily upon the pillow.

"Oh, don't you fret, Fanny!" said Herbert soothingly. "Wait till your head's better, and then things will begin to look a bit brighter."

"If I dismiss her," said Mrs. Rendell, "I must do so in writing. Of course, I know that my reasons for sending her away couldn't be clearly stated, and there is something about Miss Graeme which always makes me feel afraid of being mean."

"Think it over," said Herbert.

Think it over! Had she not thought it over, waiting for the Lord in the Valley of Decision, as the poor little woman often did, but finding no guidance given to her! It took her nearly two weeks of torturing doubt to decide what to do, and when she had at last sent a kind note of dismissal by her maid to Helen's bedroom, she flew down the passage after her to try and regain the note, only to find that it had already been given to the person to whom it was addressed.

Well, at least the matter was settled, and Mrs. Rendell slept better that night than she had done for some time; but Helen never slept at all. Life seemed so merciless just then—so difficult also. Mr. Macdonald had told her that God never forsook His children, but even he admitted that He sometimes hid His face from them, and when He did so they might well feel troubled. He at least knew that she had never

meant to behave badly. Perhaps He allowed for mistakes in the way other people never seemed able to do. She had been turned away from her first situation, and that was rather a bewildering thought for a princess. She wondered miserably if the people up at Arvan would ever hear of it. Surely they would understand and be loyal to the old name, just as her sisters would understand? But what would Major Hanbury think about it?

When Mrs. Jocelyn heard the news of Helen's intended departure she covered two telegraph forms with loving words, telling her to return to her, while Mrs. Batt stood near and implored her to be more concise.

"Ah, who would grudge a few ha'porth of kind words to a girl in trouble!" said Nan, in her strongest Irish accent; and she deliberately drew the flimsy lined papers towards her again, and signed herself "your lovingest NAN JOCELYN," before she despatched George the milkman with it, and told him to keep the change for his trouble.

CHAPTER XVII

It did not take Helen Graeme very long to discover, strenuously though Mrs. Jocelyn endeavoured to conceal the fact, that the budget was very low indeed in the little house in Finborough Road. Major Maskell had not been well, and Nan had helped with doctors' bills as well as with the nursing; and Theodore was finding that the recognition by posterity of his works was but a slender provision for present-day needs. The evening prize for a game of cards was now reduced to threepence, and the sealskin bag had a flabby look and was carefully kept closed, lest by chance any one should see its contents. Mrs. Jocelyn went to the bank once or twice in those days, and Mrs. Batt said tearfully, "What shall we do, Nan, when you are gone, if you touch your capital?"

To be a burden on this little household was clearly an impossibility, and Helen accepted the first chance of work which offered itself, and went as a typist to the Punctilio Carriage Company—"Second-hand carriages bought or exchanged; prompt attention given to orders; terms cash without discount." She worked

from half-past nine till six every day except Saturday, and she earned a salary of a guinea a week, on which she endeavoured to live in a very small lodging and to pay her 'bus fares to and from her place of business. Mrs. Jocelyn stipulated that Saturdays and Sundays should be spent with her, and she said with almost tearful hospitality that enough for two was enough for three, and did Helen really suppose that her slice off the Sunday joint was going to ruin them! "The best isn't good enough for you," she said, giving her a kiss, "and you shall have a nap on my bed on Sunday afternoons, for you are looking worn out, my child."

Lady Parfield wrote and congratulated her niece on having got a satisfactory post, and hoped she would be able to keep it. Her own expenses had been enormous, for, being attacked by fever up the Nile, she had been obliged to return to Cairo, and to pay for everything for herself and Springett out of her own pocket—and this in a place where things were simply ruinous! She enclosed Helen a cheque for one pound, with her love, and wished it was more.

There now began a time for Helen Graeme so devoid of joy, so inhumanly uncomfortable, that I do not propose to linger upon it. Her work was hard, her lodgings were mean, and her meals were of so poor a quality that perhaps only those who have themselves been through

a similar experience can quite realise the hardness of her life at this time. Landladies never quarrelled with her. She was no trouble, they said. She learned to keep her own poor room neat and tidy, and in the pitiful company of workers with whom she found herself, there being many persons whose want was greater than her own, she spared a little money for them out of the pittance which she earned. To her sisters she wrote cheerfully, and even Mrs. Jocelyn never knew what salary she received; while Mrs. Batt often called her a lucky girl, and said how much she wished that she herself could be independent.

Helen had begun her business life by walking to the office every morning, but that was in the early days of inexperience, and before she had learned that health and energy had to be stored and used as carefully as money itself. She would walk to the corner now, from whence the fare was twopence, and if it was possible she walked home in the evenings. She still believed that a night's rest would cure fatigue, and had to learn that a very hard bed in a very small room does not restore bodily vigour in quite the same way as does dreamless sleep in some spacious chamber with the strong air of the Atlantic blowing in at the window, and the great silence of the hills under a starry sky all about her. She liked to think that she could walk off her fatigue in the early morning, but in London this wholesome treatment of

a hitherto unknown complaint did not appear to be successful. It does not require any nice calculation to make aware that twopence a day in 'bus fares amounts to a shilling a week ; but the money seemed well spent, and could even perhaps be saved off lunch. The conductor of the "Imperial" had learned to look for her at the corner at eight-thirty, and even paused with his hand on the bell for a minute or two if she seemed late in coming. "You've run it a bit fine to-day, miss," he used to say, helping her into the swaying vehicle.

Yet life was not wholly hard or miserable—it probably never is to those who know where to look for the light which shines on it. Work is never altogether uninteresting to those who put their backs into it, and London, with all its poverty and dim days, and its queer mixture of squalor and wealth, was daily manifesting itself as a place so full of kindness, and of deeds both of valour and of humour, that when the eyes of a beholder were not filled with laughter they often had happy tears in them.

The unpleasant fact which detracted somewhat from this heroic view of life, and obtruded itself insistently at times, was that the man for whom Helen worked was a bully of the most pronounced type. It is difficult, indeed, in describing Mr. Simpson's character, to find very much that is good in him. Let us concede at once, however, that he had been

successful, and that he had climbed to the dizzy heights of a perpetual tall hat and a conspicuous watch-chain. But the climbing process not only seemed to have hardened Mr. Simpson, but it had produced in him an almost too vigilant suspicion of others. He was especially sceptical of "any of your stuck-up lot," and he believed that refinement was another word for "side," and that it was in some sort an impertinence to himself. Beauty could only mean conceit, and he considered it in some respects a disadvantage in a young woman who worked in the City. Most of all, Mr. Simpson disapproved of those who were not afraid of him. "I'll make them feel," he used to say to himself, and in sorry truth he did. Fortunately, we may, I think, be allowed to suppose that such a character is rare, but it is no less disagreeable to meet for that reason. There was hardly a petty tyranny that he did not impose upon his new lady clerk, and although his little jibes were less perceived by Helen than they might have been by almost any one else, she was so frequently informed by her fellow-workers that "it was a shame," that she began to believe at last that the man was intentionally unpleasant to her.

The entrance to the carriage company's premises was made through a large room completely filled with harness. The head-pieces and blinkers suggested quaintly the shape of the horses that had once worn them, as the

discarded clothes which some one has cast aside may still bear the impress of a personality upon them. There was always a smell of Dale's Dubbin in this big room, and it was kept pleasantly heated. Here stood "our Mr. Threshy" all day long, eyeing and feeling second-hand harness, and contemplating buckles and straps through his spectacles. He was rarely known to sit down, and he looked as though, when at home, he might be a respectable member of some small church in the Clapham neighbourhood. He had a kindly face—rather less shrewd than the other workers in the carriage company.

Mr. Simpson himself wore an expression which was not calculated to inspire confidence. His eyes never looked you squarely in the face, and his pointed beard gave something sharp and keen to his appearance. Mr. Simpson's legs were short and his body was long, and his clothes were gentlemanly to the point of sobriety, and he, like Mr. Threshy, was never seen without a tall hat on. Possibly the draughtiness of the long arcades of carriages may have necessitated a head-covering, but the tall hats of these gentlemen appeared to mean something more than this. They were symbolic of office; they were redundantly respectable; they vaguely suggested wealth and keen business instincts. Given a tall hat and a watch-chain, business was almost bound to prosper. Mr. Simpson appeared to be the working

partner in the firm, while his brother, Mr. Albert, was of a retiring character, and dwelt exclusively in a small room with "Private" written seriously on the door. He was an inaccessible personage and never appeared although his advice was often sought. Did a customer seem to hesitate or to waver over a purchase, there was always one particular moment when Mr. Simpson disappeared through the glass door labelled "Private"—"to see what my brother will take for it." From this mysterious chamber he would emerge in a softened mood, to sacrifice a carriage or to give away a bargain. Mr. Albert seemed to know exactly when to counsel his brother to be firm, and when to advise him to yield; his knowledge of psychology was almost unearthly, and the man or woman who had once looked at a carriage in the Punctilio Carriage Company was seldom allowed to leave its vaulted halls without making a purchase. Were they weak and timid, Mr. Albert sent out a bullying message from the seclusion of his apartment; were they firm, he merely advised discreetly; were they wavering, he considered the matter settled, and said so. Mr. Simpson, towards the close of a purchase, was merely the mouthpiece of his brother, and it often seemed to be with a real feeling of regret that he transmitted his wise if firm decisions.

But there was a still more powerful influence behind Mr. Simpson, and that was Mrs. Jenkins.

Mrs. Jenkins always had a second-hand carriage to part with at a bargain, and she was always in such a hurry to get the matter settled that no delay or consideration on the part of the purchaser was possible. She was frequently rung up on the telephone to be asked if she would wait even another twelve hours for a customer's decision, but the obdurate answer generally came back across the wires, that it was quite impossible for her to do so. If the carriage was not sold to-day, she must positively have it returned to her own coach-house. Mr. Simpson generally added to this message that "such a bargain as Mrs. Jenkins' brougham or victoria had never before been seen on the floor on this depôt, and no wonder she couldn't leave it open."

Rows of hooded victorias, like bonnets without faces under them, broughams whose doors were slammed frequently as evidence of their soundness, and carriages of antique pattern varnished into modernity, stood in rows everywhere. Mr. Simpson never had any interest in selling any of them; he got his little bit of commission, and that was all, therefore he would not press a customer to buy; but of course any one who missed the opportunity which Mrs. Jenkins' carriage afforded would regret it only once, and that was always. He would throw out his hands as though emptying them of responsibility as he spoke.

At the conclusion of a bargain Mr. Simpson's

face always perceptibly altered; he became business-like, whereas before he had simply been culpably weak or faintly persuasive. Now he wanted references, names and addresses, and, if possible, something on account. The wavering, inconclusive words of buyers were considered decisive by him, and he at once made a point of talking of the carriage or dog-cart as their own. Mr. Albert, like a veiled prophet, still remained concealed, and only issued his ultimatum through the lips of another.

It became a matter of curiosity with Helen Graeme to see the oracle who could, with so much knowledge of human nature, sway the very wills of customers, and she found herself wishing that she might by chance meet him when he came or went from his mysterious shrine. Once she asked a clerk in the office if Mr. Albert were ever visible, and the young man replied by a slight facial contortion and laid an ink-stained finger on the side of his nose, "Have you ever seen Mrs. Jenkins?" he remarked oracularly.

Helen sat all day inside a sort of glass-framed office, filled with books and ledgers, where she could be seen at any moment by her employer. If she paused in her work Mr. Simpson would rap sharply on the pane with his ringed hand, and say, "Now then, Miss Graeme, when you've quite finished moon-staring we'll get on with our work, please!"

Mr. Simpson was one of those persons upon whom weakness or even supposed weakness had a curious effect. It was positively necessary for him to have some woman upon whom to wreak his ill-temper. At home in Brixton he had a meek little wife, who spent her days in looking after the children, mending her husband's clothes and preparing his dinner. For her, Mr. Simpson's home-coming in the evening was a time of alarm and dread, and on his departure in the morning she generally breathed a meek "Thank God!" as the door closed upon him. To a man of his own size Mr. Simpson was polite—nay, almost deferential—and rosy-faced Mr. Threshy, reading over some of his partner's drastic business letters to clients and others, would often jocosely refer to him as "a lamb to meet and a lion on notepaper." Mr. Simpson considered that Miss Graeme was particularly suited for a method of treatment which he called "allowing no sort of nonsense." He based his theory on the fact that Helen was a lady, and his idea of a lady was a person with airs who needed to be taken down a peg. Also it happened about this time that in consequence of "those beastly motors" the Punctilio Carriage Company was not getting rid of so many broughams and victorias as usual. This of course made Mr. Simpson somewhat depressed in spirit, and, as was common with him, his depression took the form of irritation. It was impossible to get rid of this malady even by

frightening his little wife at home nearly into fits, and indeed for many years her meek spirit had given him so little to contend with that she could not be said to be a satisfactory outlet for his exasperation.

But Miss Graeme, who in spite of poor fortune still held her head with a certain patrician air, gave her employer something to work upon. Her smallest mistakes in business phraseology were sneered at and held up to ridicule before the clerks and the office-boy, and a mis-spelt word was an occasion for Mr. Simpson to request "Miss Graeme to come here herself." Then an explanation would be asked for, and the office-boy would try to linger behind to "hear Miss get wot for." Mr. Simpson was, of course, perfectly aware that a young lady would not come to him as a clerk at a guinea a week unless that miserable sum meant practically her daily bread. He had no fear that she would, to use his own expression, throw up her place. She was nearly as securely tied to him as was the timid little woman at Brixton, whose only hymn of joy was the "Thank God" that echoed down the wax-cloth passage every morning on the closing of the front door behind her husband. Consequently Mr. Simpson continued to instruct Miss Graeme in her duties in his own particular style, without fear of any disagreeable consequences or "cheek" on her part.

Now, the worst of it was, that after a time it began to dawn on Mr. Simpson that his very pardonable firmness with an inexperienced lady clerk was not so much unresented by her, as that it failed somehow to touch her. Once or twice, when he had lost his temper badly, it even struck him to wonder if she was not feeling a little sorry for him. Sometimes it was exactly, Mr. Simpson thought, as if he was speaking to her in an unknown tongue. There were moments when he found her regarding him not unkindly, but as rather a curious being whose habits she was studying. He caught her eye, and rapping sharply with his pencil on his desk, he said, "I hope you will know me next time you see me, Miss Graeme."

He grudged holidays to all his staff, but when he saw that Miss Graeme always appeared punctually in the morning, and had never been known to ask for an hour away from her duties, he asked her sharply if she had no friends in London.

"Very few indeed," said Helen.

"You are too haughty to have friends," replied Mr. Simpson, making the most of an opportunity.

Again he found Helen's eyes turned upon him with a half-puzzled look. She continued to address envelopes and send out circulars as before, and she listened to Mr. Simpson's one-sided sentences to Mrs. Jenkins on the telephone, and thought that in June everything

would be well again. Mr. Simpson was part of the machine, not an agreeable part, but perhaps all business was conducted with some show of sharpness and ill-temper. Even the shining glass panels of her office were for Helen not so much comfortless as almost non-existent. Her world was still in Scotland, amongst hills and wide spaces set round by the clean, deep-sounding Atlantic Ocean. It was peopled with many heroes and heroines, while the men and women whom she knew and understood were of the same gentle thoughts and ideas as herself.

She could not have compared Mr. Simpson with her father, Major Hanbury, or Mr. Byng, for he seemed to have nothing in common with them.

It is probably true that we can only apprehend that of which we are a part; and there being in the Punctilio Carriage depôt no part of herself at all Helen failed to apprehend it. This saved her some of those bruises and hurts which another poor soul, nearer to the common things of life, might have felt more deeply.

In physic one is led to suppose that pain can be relieved by a counter irritant, and it is sad to have to confess that the painfulness of Helen Graeme's present existence was only made supportable by a far deeper pain. Major Hanbury's expeditionary force had not been heard of for many weeks, and the poor child's

one thought, her daily prayer, was that she might see him again. There was not a telegram in the papers that she did not read, there was not a poster such as newsboys carry that she did not scan anxiously, to see if there were any tidings of him. Working hours might be long, and fare poor, and Mr. Simpson's manners might leave much to be desired; but these seemed very small things in face of the fact that days came and went, and the weeks passed, and still there was no news of the expedition. It was not the lover only whom she missed and for whose welfare she prayed, but the companion to whom every perplexity had been taken. There are doubtless love-affairs which are conducted with an effort; the lady enjoys her lover's protestations and his admiration, but there is an unspoken feeling, perhaps, in the feminine mind, when the *fiancé* returns to London after the holidays, or the soldier rejoins his regiment, that she has been living at high pressure for some time past, and mingled with regrets for the absent one there may be an acknowledged sense of rest.

With Helen it had never been so; to be with Charles Hanbury had meant not only sympathy of ideas, but it had meant also transferring on to very capable shoulders burdens which had sometimes pressed closely. Almost every day brought the sense that she would like to ask him something; she realised her inexperience

at every turn, and wanted his advice. She felt the isolation which those who have not grown up in crowds are bound to feel in the midst of a throng, and she wanted the understanding that he always gave her—the prompt, briefly worded sympathy that had never been withheld. That was love, and she had hardly known it, and when the knowledge of it came Charles was thousands of feet above the snows, and people had begun to whisper that he would never come back again alive.

She began to know the solitude of women, with its sense of fear—the fear as of a lost child. The burden of crowds weighed upon her, and a concert to which she went alone found her with tears in her eyes so hardly restrained that the effort not to weep was an agony. She never saw the name of Major Hanbury in a newspaper or on a poster that her heart did not sink, and she would say to herself, “he is dead.” If her sisters should come back she would be happier, but solitude would not cease with their return. She wondered why loneliness should only come with loving. “I am getting sorry for myself,” she said once, brushing her tears aside, and she realised that that made suffering almost unendurable; and then courage came back, because otherwise endurance was impossible. Her prayers were all for him, and with him for herself. “God bring him back—God take care of him for me.” She hardly knew sometimes in these days when it

was that she was praying, or when she had ceased to pray.

In May Agatha wrote announcing her engagement to Sydney Byng, and the letter was so full of unquestioning happiness that it seemed like good news from a far country. Sydney wrote too: the wedding was to be in July from his sister's house, and Helen would please give up work this instant, and prepare for the home-coming in June.

So Helen gave notice to Mr. Simpson, who was first surprised, then incredulous, and then bullying.

"It's all very well," he said, "but I have paid you good wages all the quiet time of the year, and now, just when there is business doing, and all the season carriages wanted, I have got to find some one who doesn't understand the work. One way and another," he continued, "I have been very near ruined this year, and now that I might be pushing matters outside the depôt, I suppose I shall have to be tied by the leg instructing a new clerk and jolly well halving my business."

"Oh, I hope not!" said Helen, with compunction.

"You hope not!" replied Mr. Simpson. "I think you will see, Miss Graeme, that I have treated you pretty well, and overlooked many mistakes and much inexperience on your part."

"I made a good many mistakes at first," admitted Helen humbly.

"Yes, you did," said Mr. Simpson, pressing homeward the point. He had never had another secretary who had worked as well, nor, indeed, one who had borne with his insupportable temper for the same length of time.

"Now, look here," he said magnanimously, "I am a business man, and I want to do the best I can for my business. I don't deny that I should lose custom if I wasn't able to be away from the office a good deal just now. Let's settle it this way," he concluded, in exactly the same manner as he concluded the sale of a carriage, "I'll raise you two bob a week, and you shall stay with me till the first week in July, when the season's work is practically over."

Helen had known sterner natures than she herself possessed overruled by Mr. Simpson, and had even seen disconsolate customers turning away the unhappy possessors of carriages which they did not require. She heard Mr. Simpson remark that "that was a promise, anyway," and she wrote to Sydney, and told him that she would certainly go and stay with his sister as soon as she returned to London, and that she would meanwhile give up her present rooms, which were inconvenient and far away. "How did you ever hear of such a place?" Sydney had written, when he knew her address. "I thought such a quarter only existed in the imagination of a 'bus-conductor. As for money, Agatha and I intend to be your

tenants at Arvan for the next little while, and we shall be able to give you a better rent than Mr. Schumacher has done; so there is no reason why you should do without anything you want."

There were many people to be helped out of that first year's rent. The lodger whose payment was in arrears, and a crippled man on the next floor, who illuminated Christmas cards and wrote menus, which, for a man habitually hungry, must have been an ironical task. Mrs. Jocelyn, who was to receive her as a guest for the next few weeks, must be repaid in some such royal fashion as would leave everything except her kindness a debt fully discharged; Mrs. Batt, who made, by her ever-open palm, the act of giving not only more blessed, but more easy than it sometimes is to receive, must certainly have a satin gown for Agatha's wedding; and some publisher of magazines must be heavily bribed to accept Mr. Theodore Batt's work at so many guineas a thousand.

Helen's own wardrobe must be replenished, and there is no doubt that she earned disapproval once more by her mode of expending her salary. She may even have made Mr. Simpson regret his generous "rise" when he saw her so well dressed and beautiful. Once she was discovered getting out of a cab at his door, and her employer said sarcastically that she hadn't much to do with her money.

"As a matter of fact," said Helen simply, "I

have a great deal to do with it, and that is why I think I enjoy spending it so much."

"You will be spending too much some of these days," said Mr. Simpson, "and then where will you be?"

"Ah, where indeed!" said Helen.

Agatha's future was secured; they were all going to be happy at Arvan again; but her own life, when she looked into the far-away of it, never seemed to be completed, and Major Hanbury had not been heard of for many weeks.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE expedition came to an end in an unexpected manner. The reason for this was generally held to be that Charles Hanbury had a certain dogged way of doing things. He had crossed some mountain passes which were called impracticable, and had stormed a native stronghold which was deemed impregnable. He never seemed to find out how difficult a thing was until he had done it, and he marched straight on, doing his duty in a simple sort of way which betrayed a sad lack of imagination. The native chiefs believed him to be endued with some mysterious powers which rendered him victorious everywhere, whereas he was simply an English soldier with a wholesome contempt for the safety of his own skin. The expeditionary force followed him loyally. Once when the danger of proceeding further seemed so far to outweigh any chance of success that even the members of his staff—picked men though they were—wondered if their leader were not going near to foolhardiness, he summoned them, and laid the matter before them.

"To go on," he said, addressing the officers and men in his snow-bound camp on the crest of a mountain—"to go on may mean death,

it will certainly mean death to some of us; it will also mean privations, and I do not need to remind you that if we do not return to the plains during this cold weather we cannot fail to lose a certain percentage both of English and natives from frost-bite and cold. I will turn back," said Major Hanbury, "if you desire it; but I think we should remember that the eyes of England are upon us."

They gave him a cheer, and went forward. The loss of life in the bitter weather was less than they had anticipated. The impregnable stronghold was stormed, and in the Sacred City whither he was bound the men laid down their arms and came out to meet him. The conditions which England had imposed were signed without a blow, and Major Hanbury left the hall of audience with the scroll in his hand, and went and sat down on a little hill overlooking the place, and gazed upon it with a sense of wonder.

Perhaps only then did he realise what his task had been, and even he, modest though he was, must have known that he had done excellent work. His men were safe and in good condition, the casualties from wounds and cold had been less than they had dreamed of, and where it had been possible to go on peaceably no blood was shed. Even the politicians in England, who instruct and guide such expeditions from nicely warmed benches at St. Stephen's, were disposed to say that Major

Hanbury had done well. They spoke of him in a manner almost self-congratulatory over their comfortable dinners, while the policeman's step sounded safely and reassuringly outside. And men going down to the House in their broughams, their feet on hot-water tins, mentally meted out a suitable reward for him, and said that he would certainly get a K.C.B. Even our sentimental representatives in the House, who believe that pain is the worst evil that can happen to a man, and protest that in the name of heaven our darlings must be protected from all hard blows, very nearly admitted that this expedition, in spite of its many glaring mistakes, which they carefully pointed out, had been fairly successful.

Major Hanbury sat alone upon the hillside, and looked down on the city with its walls and gates, its minarets and uncouth buildings. "I suppose," he said to himself, "that nothing trivial or petty will ever matter again. One couldn't quarrel with any one after this. Small things don't seem of much consequence now. But I wish Helen knew."

He had nothing of hers to cherish as a keepsake—there was not even a flower which she had ever given him; but he took out of his pocket some letters of hers which accompanied him everywhere, and two crumpled banknotes which she had put into his hand the very last time he had seen her. There was not a single incident of that meeting with her which he had not recalled

a hundred times since. But as the weeks went by the words she had said were growing fainter. The fragrant warm scent of the conservatory which had followed him so long was losing its haunting trouble. The grey ashes of his love had one burning thought at the heart of them, and everything else was becoming insignificant beside it. Helen had raised his hand to her lips, and had kissed it when she said good-bye.

Soon the heliograph, the telegraph, and the cable would be sending the news of his success to king and viceroy and Parliament, and to all the rest of the world. And meanwhile, the man who had won sat on the hillside with two crumpled banknotes in his hand, and wondered what a girl would think about it all.

When he returned to England in the summer a Royal personage went to Victoria Station to meet him, and walked on a strip of red carpet to the door of the railway carriage in which he sat, gave him his congratulations, and shook hands with him. There was a crowd outside the railway station, and people were cheering him and his august companion. It was Saturday afternoon, and the streets were thronged as he drove away.

Helen Graeme, walking homewards from the office, noticed the crowds first, and heard the cheering and saw hats waved, and some one near her said, "It's the returned 'ero—'im as walked stright into Sacred City just to s'y 'ow-do-you-do to the old boss there." She saw

the carriage and the Royal liveries, and within it sat the Duke and Major Hanbury.

On the first evening of his arrival there were no dinners or banquets, and he went back to his old rooms in St. James' and changed his clothes. Afterwards he hailed a hansom, and drove through the familiar streets with that queer sense of wonder upon him that almost every one knows who returns to England after being in the wild places of the earth. The passing hansoms and the carriages filled with men and women in evening dress going out to dinner or to the play had an unreal look about them. The luxury of his plainly furnished rooms seemed a little overdone. London appeared like a giant machine—glittering, well oiled, very ornamental, and touched with an absurd sense of unreality. The regulation of traffic, the discreetly closed shops, the throng of London's humbler citizens in their decorous, sombre clothing, all helped to minister to the dim sense of wonder which possessed him. The sight of some familiar face gave him an odd start, and he had driven past before he even remembered to make a salute.

The bustle and roar of the day were over for the most part. Work was finished, the shops were closed, and the inhabitants of London were enjoying themselves in their several ways. The horse of the cab in which he was driving was a good one; it took the downward slope of Piccadilly at a brave pace, and the glittering

wheels of the hansom flashed and winked in the setting sun. The sun was full in Charles Hanbury's face as he drove westward towards the little house in Finborough Road. He hardly knew if Helen would be there, but he knew it was there that he would get tidings of her.

The spirited cab-horse was still carrying him westward when he saw Helen herself turn in at the gates of Kensington Gardens. He raised his stick to stop the cab, and overtook her in the open space just below the Albert Memorial. Of course there is no sort of privacy at all at this particular spot; but if the place had been filled with troops or crowds, instead of being merely occupied by a few mean folk to whom the sacred hour of dinner meant nothing, and some groups of children who had been allowed to play late because of the heat of the summer evening, it would have made no manner of difference to Major Hanbury.

Perhaps nothing surprises lovers—least of all a happy coincidence. "I knew you would come," says the lady, whether she is walking in Kensington Gardens or in some much more unlikely spot. "I thought I should find you here," says the lover, although the place of encounter would surprise any one less convinced than he that Fate was shaping circumstance towards some prearranged and beautiful end. And when age comes, and the intellectual rising generation instructs the old

people about brain-waves and telepathy, these simple, sentimental, hopelessly unintelligent persons miss altogether the scientific aspect of the phenomena by telling some lover's tale of long ago. "I woke in the morning, and knew he would come," she says. "I dreamed that very night that I would hear from her, and her letter was there," says he.

Major Hanbury and Helen met, and on my faith as a true historian I do not know what they first said to each other. In after years they never could tell me, and I myself feel doubtful if they said anything at all. They wandered right away into the heart of the gardens, and they sat down presently on two little seats underneath a tree, and then at last Major Hanbury spoke.

"So it is all right?" he said.

Helen put her hand in his, and he held it closely in his own.

I do not know that they ever had any explanation with each other; I think Mrs. Jocelyn told Major Hanbury more about Lady Parfield's letter than he heard from Helen herself. I believe their understanding of each other was so complete that there were no questions asked. I know that in after years one never used to hear them say "Why?" to each other, or "What was this done for?" or "What was the reason of that?" I always remember Major Hanbury as a silent man, but his singular scantiness of expression covered

an idealism which was deeper and more convincing in him than I have known it in any other man whom I have ever met. But I am going far ahead, to the time when I used to stay with them up at Arvan, and when their love for each other seemed only to have deepened with years, and when that sympathy between them of which I have spoken was a thing which is quite indescribable by the pen of a poor novelist.

When they went homeward at last they found Major Hanbury's hansom still waiting patiently at the gate, and this made them both laugh. He with that sudden unexpected mirth in which shy men indulge sometimes; she with that spontaneous enjoyment which he remembered so well in her; and both of them in fact with so much enjoyment that the sight of a hansom cab waiting for an hour or two at the entrance to Kensington Gardens might have been one of the most singular and absurd occurrences in the world.

I have no doubt that Major Hanbury paid the cabman well. I have no doubt that when they returned to Finborough Road Mrs. Jocelyn produced some splendid banquet for them on the instant. I have no doubt at all that Mrs. Batt was dignified and stately; and that Theodore, in the excitement of the moment, garnished his conversation with quite a gala allowance of untruths. But I must leave all this untold in order to hasten forward and tell

of the happy meeting when the sisters were reunited to each other. The Duchess of Lester opened her hospitable house to them, and wept genuine tears because she had never been allowed, in that horrible rest-cure, to know what her friends were doing. She wept still further, and vowed and protested, because Helen insisted on fulfilling her contract with her employer, and working for him till the first week in July.

"But there is my ball coming off on the 6th," said the Duchess, "and I can't have you working and being tired for that."

"After all, it is only a week longer," said Helen; "and Mr. Simpson so often tells me that women never keep their promises."

The joyousness of her aspect during that last week annoyed Mr. Simpson very much. He even began to feel his feelings a little bit, and he said to Helen sarcastically, "You seem pleased to think that your labours will soon be at an end, Miss Graeme. I hope you may be better suited where you go next."

"I think I shall," said Helen, smiling.

This appealed to Helen as a delicious joke, and she repeated it to Major Hanbury afterwards. But it never struck Mr. Simpson in a comic light at all. He frowned, and said, "You will be kind enough to apply yourself to your work a little more diligently than you have been doing lately if you want a character from me!"

This remark also seemed to Helen so full of

mirth that she could not help carrying the joke a little farther—perhaps for the pleasure of being able to tell it to Major Hanbury. She smiled as she sat at her desk in the little glass office, and looked at Mr. Simpson with her eyes now full of laughter, and said, "But I lost my character long ago, and my next employer is going to take me without one."

Mr. Simpson thought this remark suspicious, and he reflected—not for the only time by any means—firstly, that Helen was too good-looking; and secondly, that she must have very few recommendations, or she would not have remained in the Punctilio Carriage Company so long.

"Well, we'll get to work now, if *you* please," he said, by way of closing the discussion, which he admitted he was not able to understand; "but remember," he added, as he left the room, "I am not responsible for any one to whom I do not give a written recommendation."

All that day Helen sat smiling over her work, and once she thought what fun it would be, if she and Major Hanbury should want to buy carriages, to come here and purchase them.

But she met Mr. Simpson in a very unexpected way long before the time came for choosing carriages. The rest sounds like a story-book, but the faithful historian is not responsible.

It was the night of the Duchess of Lester's ball, and it is believed that the rooms of her

historic house have never looked more sumptuous nor more splendid than they did then. Carpenters and florists and electricians had transformed the halls and corridors into rose-bowers and arcades of flowers. The ball was epitomised in the journals as being "one of the most brilliant of the season." The Duchess herself, hardly recovered from her recent illness, was obliged to sit at the head of her staircase to receive her guests, while Helen stood beside her. The band played distractingly, and down below in the dining-room the servants were putting the finishing touches to the supper-tables. A solemn butler admitted a few privileged friends to come and take a look at the decorations on the table before the room should be thrown open to her Grace's guests.

"There'll not be another ball like it this season," said the butler to his brother, conveying him in a proud circuit round the room.

"It's the real aristocracy who know how to do this sort of thing properly," said his brother.

"Most of the stands for the decorations are going to be kept up for the two weddings," remarked the butler.

"I must say I should like to have a peep at the hero," said the butler's brother, "and the lady herself, I'm told, is a great beauty."

"Here she comes," said the butler, "and Sir Charles is with her." He tried, without the least success, to smuggle his admiring relative out of the room as Helen came into it.

She had only descended for a moment with Charles for a forgotten fan, and they came up the long room and found it on a little table by the fireplace. There is no doubt about it that, seen together like this, they presented a very admirable and comely appearance. The height of both was a little above the average, and Helen's beauty shone without limitation of poor dress or tired looks to-night.

"Now, what in the name of fortune," said the butler's brother, "is Miss Graeme doing here?"

He tried to hide his portly figure—his short legs and long body, and his gold watch-chain of office—behind a screen, but not before Helen had caught sight of him. She looked in a bewildered fashion first at Charles, then at the butler, and then at Mr. Simpson.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Charles," said the old butler, "but I was just allowing my brother to take a look round before any one should come in. Come this way, Bob," he said to Mr. Simpson, indicating the nearest exit towards the lower regions.

But Helen had stepped forward and shaken her employer by the hand. "I did not see you to say good-bye before I left the office," she said.

I do not know for certain, but I believe that if Mr. Simpson had been in a position to come up to the ballroom at that moment and ask her for a dance, Helen would have given it to him. She was one of those women to whom retaliation as a pleasure does not even suggest itself.

She knew nothing about the triumph of having the last word, and she never dreamed of glorying in any one's discomfiture.

Perhaps a dim sense of this large-heartedness of hers may even have dawned upon the mind of Mr. Simpson, or perhaps he expected her to be haughty and to sweep by him with a grand air. I do not pretend to analyse his feelings, but I know that when Helen shook hands with him he stared open-mouthed at the vision in white satin before him, and then he looked at Sir Charles Hanbury.

"I beg your pardon humbly, ma'am," he said at last; and because he seemed to have some difficulty in quitting the spot where he stood, his brother plucked him by the sleeve and motioned him out of the room.

Helen never saw him again; but Mrs. Simpson always believes that something happened to her husband on the evening when he went to see the decorations at Lester House.

For a whole week he never contradicted her, and one Sunday not long afterwards he took her for a walk on Wandsworth Common, and actually asked her if she was tired. Mrs. Simpson was reminded of her early married days, and the tears flooded her eyes as she said, "Not a bit, Bob; it is a pleasure to have a walk"—although, as a matter of fact, her legs ached with fatigue. If Mr. Simpson had died about this time his wife would probably have reported of him that he had always been a good

husband to her. One kind word has an extraordinary power of nullifying a whole life-time of ill-usage. But Mr. Simpson continued to live, and to sell second-hand carriages, and it was his little wife who died first, after a few more years of fatigue. Still, she often remembered to say that Bob was his old self again, and she never forgot that walk on Wandsworth Common when her husband had offered her his arm, and she felt like a girl once more.

Let another pen than mine try to do justice to the two weddings which took place shortly after the Duchess's ball. Mrs. Batt was there in black silk, and she talked of the day all the rest of her life in a very proud and boring manner; also, if one may be allowed the expression, she rubbed the splendour of it down the throats of all her humbler friends until they came to hate the very name of the weddings. But Mrs. Batt felt herself established for ever, and no landladies ever took liberties with her from that day forth.

Mrs. Jocelyn was in a state of nervous excitement difficult to describe. She occupied her time in helping men-servants and waiters to hand about refreshments at the wedding breakfast, and, like a second Sir Walter Raleigh, she repeatedly spread out the train of Helen's wedding-gown for every one to step upon. She cried unrestrainedly during the marriage ceremony, and profusely tipped a pew-opener—

she said she knew from the first moment she saw him that he was a sympathetic man ; and she openly flouted Lady Parfield, who, as aunt of the brides, occupied a notable position on this occasion.

The wedding presents also must remain undescribed. I noticed one tasteful almanac in a silver frame with Lady Parfield's card, and "many, many good wishes" upon it, and her ladyship explained to me herself that it was the kind thought rather than the value of a present that counted. She met scores of people whom she knew at the wedding, and effected many introductions. And she told Helen afterwards that she did her best to keep Mrs. Jocelyn and Mrs. Batt in the background (for all their sakes), without any success. She always considered that the presence of her two Irish cousins was the one blot on a brilliant occasion, but she consoled herself with the thought that nearly every one has a few relations whom they want to hide. Sydney Byng frankly snubbed her, and he has given up his house next hers in Onslow Gardens.

And here I will make an end. And if I have done well, as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired ; but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto. And here shall be an end.

This book should be returned to
the Library on or before the last date
stamped below.

A fine of five cents a day is incurred
by retaining it beyond the specified
time.

Please return promptly.

~~DUE OCT 26 '36~~

~~JUE MAY - 16 '38~~

DUE MAR 27 '47

